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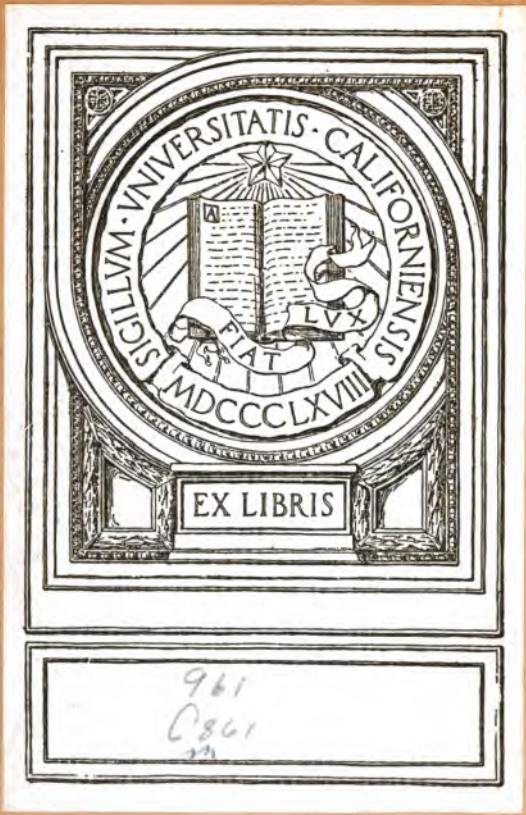

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THE MASK

JOHN COURNOS

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THE MASK

BY

JOHN COURNOS

NEW YORK

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OVERTURE:

A PROMISE AND A WARNING

JOHN GOMBAROV'S supreme frailty, if frailty it can be called in a world as frail as ours, was his habit of discoursing upon life—his life. This weakness, common enough in old men and philosophers to be overlooked by a none too tolerant world, might indeed have been tedious not to say grotesque in any other young man than Gombarov, upon whom the habit sat like a gallant garment, made by a prince of tailors—so much so that the two or three intimate friends to whom, from time to time, he unbosomed himself, far from frowning upon him, encouraged him.

Who, if not this same Gombarov, should discourse upon life? Let every man to his trade. He had lived life, had steeped himself in life, and the blend of his woes and joys produced a brew ironic and piquant rather an insipid or bitter. And in recounting his tragi-comic experiences, he spoke quietly and evenly, and used neither the violent gesture of the tragic actor nor the forced guffaw of the comedian; you felt rather the oracular manner of a man who accepted everything and was astonished at nothing.

"A man's life," observed Gombarov in one of his reflective moods, "is on the surface a series of isolated pictures, yet in some mysterious way connected or grouped into a harmonious if not always a perfect pattern. And this invisible continuous design, which runs through a man's life like a *motif* through a musical com-

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position, is called character by some men, destiny by others—which after all depends whether you regard life as the sport of nature or the puppet play of the gods."

But Gombarov reached this conclusion later, much later, than the events about to be recorded here, events —or to use his own word, pictures—in which he had been more or less the central figure.

"That is to say," he went on in his parabolic way, in keeping with his Eastern origin, "that circumstance, however potent in influencing men's lives, plays in the case of really strong, or, if you will, fated characters only a secondary part, say equal to that which the grindstone plays in sharpening a steel axe. And by strong I refer by no means to men of action, but to individuals whose latent power of endurance and resistance is greater than any force of aggression falling to its lot to strive with, and the most formidable onslaught may affect its possessor only happily if at all."

There was proof of the blindness, and therefore of the inexorableness of this power, in that Gombarov stumbled upon his discovery much later, when he had left all the events which led up to it, sent to try him, quite behind him, like so many mile-stones. He had at this time paid in thirty years of his debt to creditor Time, leaving an unknown balance which, with experience thus gained, he hoped to make better use of.

Nevertheless, he deemed the experiences which had so far fallen to his lot peculiarly his own, in that his personality had attracted them like a magnet and rejected others—a process, to his way of thinking, automatic and subconscious.

He made himself clear on this point. Many of his adventures seemed hardly picturesque or joyous at the time they took place. On the contrary, some of them

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seemed very confused, unnecessary and almost too painful. They became pictures, orderly old-masterly compositions only much later, in the looking back on them, when they lost their sting for him, and the pain of them was gone, when the artist in him apprehended the man in divine detachment. When the confusion of the present had ceased to be, and he looked back on all with a serene onlooker's eye it became clear to him that whatever the unknown future might reveal, his unplanned and apparently chaotic past was as consequent and as logical as the game of an expert chess player, who had planned all his moves ahead and made many sacrifices and seeming mistakes to secure the position he wanted. There was, of course, the pain of doubt, unlooked-for moves by a wily adversary, temporary regrets at having moved a pawn to the wrong square or at having moved a knight backward instead of forward.

And, in this series of pictures of life looked back upon, Gombarov saw each picture complete in itself, yet all of them together formed the parts of a larger and grander composition, which gave rise to a mood, akin to the one in which he had many a time stood before a wall decoration by Veronese or Titian, as, eyeing a small detail of the panel, he had said to himself: "Here is a piece of colour so beautiful that I should be happy in possessing but a few square inches of it, framed, and hung on my wall." In such a mood he liked to think of a man's life not as a play or a novel but as a collection of short stories conceived by a single mind and dominated by a single personality, which in some latent unobvious way is the sole hero of them all.

That was one mood. In another more ecstatic moment all the parts of his varied life appeared to merge inevitably into a structural unity, like a Greek play.

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Now he could afford to laugh at the sinister comedy of life, its grotesque *macabre,* its distorted, gargoyle-like beauty, for he had acted Act One—his past—and while acting, he had suddenly caught sight of himself, towards the end of the act, in a mirror hidden in the wings; and, having once got hold of the secret, he became thereafter, as it were in an instant, yet really not in an instant, a spectator of his own absurd figure, whose face appeared to laugh or to sob, according to the contour in which it was revealed, as he stood there straining his ear to catch the words of some strange, unseen prompter in an unrehearsed play. And, having caught with all this a sense of inevitable fatality which attends upon those born to incur the steady displeasure of the gods, he felt that now he could go on with the tragi-comic play with keen interest, even amusement, that indeed to some degree he could assist, if need be supplant, the demoniac prompter.

There was still another mood, in which he thought of his past as of a once dark cavern, lit up in the beginning as by flashes of lightning—rare moments followed by long lapses of deeper darkness—a cavern now ever accessible to him by the pressure of an unseen and mysterious push-button, which, at his will and in his own chosen time, flooded the place with light; the designs thus suddenly revealed upon the walls were at once precise, beautiful and fantastic. He indeed had once suspected them there as he groped with his fingers and felt the incisions in the rough stone and wondered as he groped there whether the graven figures were monsters or angels. He could not even say with any degree of surety that the figures were there in the beginning. He did not remember when he first felt their presence, now it seemed to him that some unseen and

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ever-present spirit had cut them into the stone during his, John Gombarov's, life-time, and again that he had learned to discern them only gradually with eyes which grew ever sharper in the darkness and to feel them with fingers which grew more and more sensitive as the time went on. He had slept on a stone for pillow and dreamt of angels. He had wrestled in the darkness with the invisible one—as Jacob had wrestled with the angel, and knew that he had thrown him, though, like Jacob he suffered his adversary to maim him.

Lines had come on his face early, formed less by wind or storm of circumstance than by internal action, volcanic as it were in character: it was as if the restlessness within had forced the outer resisting shell into formations masking rather than revealing; lines of strength and of pathos mixed themselves up on his face, which, especially when he laughed—and he laughed often—gave him a strange exotic look, of which he was not unconscious, having often in his loneliness "made faces" at himself in the mirror. This either amused or terrified him; for it was strange to see his face so absurdly benign in repose, its diffuse smile all radiating as it were from eyes full of pity, transformed in an instant into an appearance malignant and Mephistophelian. And as his face in repose had dignity he concluded that evil had some indefinable connection with ugliness, and that his ability to render himself thus leeringly ugly was an indication that behind the god in him lurked a satyr. He was confident that had not our poor life placed so many shackles on him and drained him of his physical strength it would have been as easy for him to practise Mohammedan virtues as Christian charity. Such is the heart of man, which as the Russians say, is a dark forest.

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The spirit of the East lay dreamily upon his otherwise energetic, clear-cut features, and gave them, when not animated, a curious sense of arrested activity. Thus a white-garmented Arab, poised on his horse at standstill, might have looked on beholding a mirage in a desert. He was rather proud of this likeness to an Arab, and though he was a Jew he had no ambition of being a Rothschild, but an intense romantic longing, never to be gratified, of living in caravansaries. And it was perhaps this insatiate longing that in spite of his Western habits and Western environment made him look upon life with an Eastern eye: "Life is a caravansary, men come and men go." But with this was complicated the fact that his family had been domiciled on Russian soil for many generations, so that a note of the restless Slav nature crept into his deep grey eyes, and its sadness overlaid the Eastern fatalism like a scant veil. There was a suggestion of curiosity in his long straight nose slightly dipping at the point, and his lips were full and sensual. Black ringlety hair fell about his head and strayed to his pale forehead. Sometimes he looked incredibly young for his years, sometimes much too old.

Altogether this personality represented in its make-up a clash of races, a clash of temperaments, a clash of reflective and energetic forces, and having been torn up by the roots from its original mould, and replanted in another place, then reshifted elsewhere—having moreover come under the influence of the unstable, shifting arts and moralities of the age, and yet kept something of the nature of its ancient soul,—this personality was almost a physical symbol of the tenacious persistence of old spirits under the pressure of an age of iron, twentieth century cosmopolitanism.

But Gombarov realised this only much later, when he

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came to London, and idle but hospitable hostesses, anxious to replenish their stock of lions, invited him to afternoon teas. As he modestly regarded himself as only a cub, he was no little astonished to what extent his fame, yet to be earned, had preceded him. For he had no motor car, he having just then come from a land in which the possession of a motor car was the accepted measure of literary success. But here in London, with ten shillings to his bank account, he was held to be a potential person; so that after many lean, unappreciated years it pleased him to hear in this welcoming island the women's pleasant voices greeting him after introduction, not without stirring in him a sense of quiet irony:

"I am so fond of the Russians!"

As if he were a delicious oyster.

You almost expected to hear them say: "Let's have another!"

It mattered little that he so often lapsed into long silences, for he bore to them an aspect of a hawk hovering, and they sometimes glanced at him from under their eye-lashes as if they expected him to make a sudden swoop downwards as at the sight of prey, and to provoke this eloquent flight they dropped an occasional remark calculated to draw him. When people expect so much of a man they are bound to be disappointed, and if not disappointed it is because they will so often attribute to the man who has thus fallen short of their expectations a fascinating if irritating nonchalance.

But at the time our story begins John Gambarov had far from begun to contemplate life with the careless nonchalance of a tranquil mask, lit up at rare moments by an almost imperceptible smile of irony as motionless and as reposeful as Buddha's.

This mask of Gombarov's, with its subtle contours of

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repose and irony, was not created in a day. A mask, it may be assumed, conceals more than it reveals. And in this sense a mask is the measure of art. It may express a titanic struggle in an appearance of tranquillity. And in the degree that its appearance is tranquil to that extent has a spirit conquered life. The chaos of Gombarov's existence strove toward orderliness, his torments towards peace, his pain toward beauty —all these shaped the mask from below into an appearance of tranquillity.

This is the story of the making of a human mask.

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PART I

RUSSIA—THE ROOTS

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"And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he *is* in thine hand; but save his life."

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THE MASK

PART I

CHAPTER I

VANYA'S CHILDHOOD: HOW HE SAW IT AFTERWARD

THERE was first of all the little village, more a dream than a memory. Looking backward, there were things which outlined themselves with shrill clearness, there were things which lost themselves in a confused haze. There were keen moments, moods of quiet aloneness, when John Gombarov, sitting in his little room in London, his whole being attuned to see, to hear and to feel, shot arrows of vision across the seas, lands and years which separated him from this little place, where he spent the first ten years of his life. And all this early childhood re-erected itself before him more like phantasmagoria than life. It was in the beginning a world of germinating chaos—a world of blind fears, of hardly conscious desires, of all sorts of frail, quivering things—an altogether nebulous world, in which you heard something, saw something, felt something; you grazed a vague shape here, a phantom there, but there were other shapes and half-shadows of shapes, unknown and half-familiar, which eluded you, darted away like so many blurs in a fog, and filled the thick air with their blurred laughter. And he seemed to hear human voices, disjointed fragments of conversation, yet could not distinguish the words.

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In a sense, all his childhood, spent in Russian woods and country, was like that. But there were oases of lucidity, sun-lit spaces which stood out in harsh contrast against the grey living mystery from which you just emerged. And it was strange to reflect that just as it was with people, only a few of the many he had met stood out with sharp distinctness, so it was with the birds, the flowers and the trees he had lived among. Of all the birds he had heard cawing and singing he remembered only the crow and the nightingale, of all the flowers he had seen, his memory resurrected most vividly the poppies and the sun-flowers—fields and gardens of green, studded with red and yellow like tapestry. As for trees, he lived among them, with them—he might have been one of them—yet he knew them not so much as pines, as willows, as oaks, but simply as trees. He was a strange child without talent for particularization and with an almost over-powering tendency to abstraction, so much so that he remembered having bent down one day in the woods to pick up a live but motionless iron-grey snake which he had mistaken for a piece of iron, afterwards withdrawing his hand in sudden apprehension. Perhaps it was that he *felt* life rather than observed it, that he was a delicate, absorbing mechanism, which, through a union of the senses, received life as a single impression, as a distilled essence. And thus it was that although men spoke and the birds sang and the trees rustled in the wind, it all somehow seemed merged for the boy into one vast, aching silence. And he stood before the vastness of this thing as before a great cliff, an abyss, or the sea; with the apprehension of a young chick on the edge of the water as it watches its step-mother-duck floating away with its ducklings, leaving it behind. But this too he had begun to perceive early: that he was in some way, as yet incomprehensible to him, *different.*

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Childhood is the background of one's life. And in this background, as in the background of a picture, many things slowly lose themselves in the perspective,—indefinably and imperceptibly lose themselves, somewhere among the mellow warm tones, as in a peaceful pastoral, in a dense wood, or in a wall of blue sky. In trying to recall the background of his past Gombarov often found himself in the attitude of a man who was straining his ear intently to catch the distant notes of a pastoral song which came to him but faintly, in snatches, and who suffered all the pain of those lapsed intervals which no exertion of his imagination could fill out.

Then there is the foreground. That is another matter. Things and people are always clear in the foreground. All the rest is like a drop-curtain, against which the people you have known are clearly outlined, whether they walk, speak or smile, laugh hysterically, or wring their hands tragically to heaven. And against this drop-curtain, picture after picture passed before Gombarov's eyes.

There was the house he was born in and lived in, a half mile from the village. A large, two-story cottage, with a varandah that ran round three sides of it, it stood in the middle of a large grove of trees, separated on three sides from the forest by a fence of wooden rails, which continued its way around the fourth side that bordered on the road. But the front of the house faced the forest, and a path, neither broad nor narrow, led to the forest through a small gate. A broader path curved from the entrance round the house and broadened out even more as it joined the road through the wide gate. Coming out of this gate a walk of five minutes to the left would have brought you to a stretch of country, miles of green meadows and wide golden patches of corn-fields. Turning to the right from the gate would

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have led you to the village. Half way up you came to a crest of a hill; below, of an early morning, you might have had the good fortune to see the little village inundated by a sea of sun-mellowed mist; you saw as it were floating a gabled thatched roof, with its white, smoking chimney, looking altogether like the top of a miniature Noah's Ark; elsewhere you saw the tall, gilt-topped, sun-lit spire of the church, appearing to your half-awakened eyes more a lighthouse than a church spire; the tops of trees peered out as a beautiful grey tracery against grey water; there were the little white tombstones and jagged grey crosses jutting out on the side of a hill in the distance; the mist seemed to hover over them softly, as over a flock of motionless birds. Slowly the mist lifted; reluctantly the earth threw off her early morning robe, revealing the more precise beauties of her superb torso, gleaming with dew after her bath as with small jewels, silvery in the shaded parts, golden in the sun. Gradually as the mist shifted farther, your eyes, shaded by a hand, journeyed in its wake, scanned the great distances, and watched, fifteen versts away, the disclosing of that most golden of jewels, the golden cupolas of Kieff, cupola upon cupola, a cluster of cupolas, arranged like a Byzantine brooch.

If you lingered a while you would have heard the gradual approaching of voices behind you, you would have seen other eyes intent upon that splash of gold which beckoned like a flaming torch to the holy wayfarer, the honest pilgrim, the *Bogomoletz,* who, his legs swathed in rags, a bag of dry bread crusts on his back, had been walking many dreary miles for days, for months, to behold this sight of sights, this glory of glories, holy Kieff on the Dnieper, where the heart of little Mother Russia molten from the hearts of dead saints beat tremulously and enkindled in the beholder, the repentant sinner, an ecstasy of humility and pity, a rhythm

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of charity, a mood of stone-heavy burdens lifted, a feeling of purification at having washed one's blood-stained hands in the white milk of holiness—little mother Russia would take all, little mother Russia would forgive everything!

Day after day these little straggling processions passed on the road by the Gombarov house. Vanya had often stood at the gate there with Afanasya, a middle-aged peasant woman, the family nurse for years, at whose breast he had taken milk; and as he watched her grey angular face, rigidly outlined in a bandanna kerchief, a face kind in its austerity, like a drawing by Holbein, he heard her spoken to by some old greybeard:

"A crust of bread, for the sake of God! *Radi Boga!*"

And the good Afanasya would go to the house, to reappear with a big quarter of a loaf of black bread, which she would hand to the man with the remark:

"Here, little old man, *starichok!* Go on your way, and don't forget to pray for me."

The pilgrim would pronounce a word of blessing and go on. Other *Bogomoltsi* would go by.

"A crust of bread, *babushka, radi Boga!*"

"You are too late, *starichok,* I've already given away all I had."

"Never mind, *babushka,* thanks all the same."

Did young Vanya understand all that this meant? He saw and he heard, but he did not understand. No one ever told him anything. And he hated all that he was taught. He detested more than anything else his German lessons.

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CHAPTER II

VANYA'S EDUCATION—HIS FUTURE DECIDED BY THE FAMILY'S PAST

LITTLE VANYA went to the village to his tutor's house to study his German lesson. It was early in the afternoon, the tutor—Boris Lvovitch Polensky—was always out at this time giving lessons elsewhere, he would not be back for another three hours, and he would then see what Vanya had learned.

Vanya took up his German grammar, scanned his exercises, and sat there moping. He was not thinking of his German lessons. There were so many other things to think of. Vanya was a little fantast, and even then he felt all the misery of a day-dreamer assigned to the exacting tasks of daily routine. What was the use of German? He could not tell why, but in some way that he could not understand the mere sound of it grated on his ear. But there were many irrefutable reasons why he must study German. His father knew German, his grandfather knew German, most of his uncles, first cousins and second cousins knew German, his elder brother knew German. His younger brother would study German. In short, it was the tradition of the family to know German. It was part of the tradition of a family which for generations had trained physicians, though latterly some of its members had become engineers. Vanya in his childish way did not care to become either a physician or an engineer if he had to study German in order to become one. Not that he knew what

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he wanted to be. In any case, it was decreed that Vanya should become a physician, and Vanya bowed to superior force and studied German—in a fashion.

Vanya sat there moping, musing upon a thousand things . . . the beautiful woods he loved to play in . . . a wonderful world in which no German was spoken. And at the age of eight he was already driven to introspection, a habit he developed in the hours meant to be devoted to his German, a habit that was further encouraged by excellent introspective material. And like all introspective children he lived in a world of silent misery, a world all his own, sombre and restless, which no one at home, not even his mother, attempted to enter and to lighten in some way. He sat in that little room for hours thinking of the world he lived in and the people in it. Who were these people?

There was first of all his stepfather, whose name he bore. But no!—he paused for a moment to think of his own father, goodness knew where he was now, and where he had taken away Feodor, Vanya's eldest brother. He but dimly remembered one episode—a scuffle in the house, chairs being overturned, pictures coming down from the walls, he—Vanya—appearing in the door screaming; he vaguely recalled the three agitated figures, those of his father, his mother and that *other* person, an instructor in the house, as he learnt later. Vanya was three then, how could he possibly know? He only knew that his papa had gone away and that he would never, never come back again, and that he must never refer to him as papa any more, he indeed was soon to learn that there was a new papa in the house. And in spite of his infancy some mysterious instinct in his heart resisted all the efforts to impose upon it the will of maturer forces. He would not call him papa, and only did so in rare instances, in embarrassment and with great constraint. And in an unconscious way he must

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have found no little strength and justification for his attitude in the example of his mother, who almost invariably referred to his stepfather as Gombarov, and even addressed him by that name.

Five years had passed since he saw his father, and he continued to think of him, although he did not remember his face. He remembered only his medium stature, his pallor and his black beard, while all efforts to recall his features ended in the struggling thought beating helplessly against the insurmountable wall which erected itself in his mind. In the end, exhausted, he would give up in despair. But there were things—incidents, which he remembered with great clearness. It was astonishing, he reflected, that he should not remember how his father looked, and yet remember some of the things his father did for him. There were the sticks of chocolate he used to bring him from town, and what was better he had taken him to town once or twice with him and bought him each time a plate of *sakharny moroz,* sugared frost, that is ice cream. He remembered a tragic circumstance of one of these expeditions, when dragged by his father through the muddy streets, he lost one galosh. He also recalled with delight how his father sitting with crossed knees, would stand him on the tip of his swinging foot, and swinging him up and down to the accompaniment of this original rhyme on his, Vanya's, name:

"Vanchik, stakanchik, barabanchik, charlatanchik, balvanchik, ingermanchik"—that is, "Little Vanya, little tumbler, little drum, little charlatan, little fool, little young man," and so on indefinitely. It used to amaze him to see how many such rhymed variations could be got out of the diminutive of his name. And it seemed strange that his father should live for him not as a portrait, but as a group of associations.

It was not less strange about Vanya's elder brother,

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Feodor—or Fedya, as he knew him, by whose side he sometimes walked in Kieff. He remembered Fedya as always dressed in his school uniform, and, running to keep pace with him, he admired his regulation grey overcoat with its silver buttons and his grey visored cap with its impressive badge. It was useless to try to recall his brother's face, he only remembered the grey and silver uniform.

But to return to his stepfather—Semyon Bogdanovitch Gombarov. At that time Vanya had not quite realised how this man had come into his life, and why he felt constraint in his presence. Not alone constraint, but fear also. But why should he fear this man who respected the unspoken truce between them, and who never even beat him and who left all chastisement of Vanya to his mother, which was not always the case with the other children in the house? He did not fear him as a child fears its stepfather, but as a child fears the dark. For the dark to all children is a world by itself, and all sorts of fearful, invisible beings walk about in it, and all sorts of terrible things happen in it. Might not one awake in the morning to find that something had been stolen from the room or that something else had been put in it? The coming then of this man into his life was like an awakening, his first realisation of change, of life itself, which was a kind of darkness, in which things can be taken from you and other things left in their place. What did he lose then, and what was put into its place? He hardly knew. But he did not like the idea—the idea that certain things can be taken from you, without your consent or foreknowledge. At all events, from that moment—the moment his father left the house and his stepfather came in—he began to be afraid of life as of a darkness, in which some things might be taken from you and other things put in their place. And so it came about that he could seldom look

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upon the small, stocky, agile man, with his sturdy black moustaches and his small but sharp wedge-like beard, without a strange, almost unreasonable apprehension.

Vanya suddenly picked up his book, scanned his oral exercises, those curious Gothic characters which he had to translate into Russian, then the more familiar Russian phrases, which for some reason unknown to himself he had to put into German, and recite orally to his tutor. He dropped his book, picked up a plum out of the small bagful that he brought with him, and slowly drawing up its rich contents through a small hole made in the purple-red skin, he resumed his musing.

He thought of his mother, a small sensitive-faced woman with dark hair and deep grey eyes—Vanya was said to resemble her—who was very active, and appeared to be everywhere about the house, so that Vanya, on rare occasions, stealing a newly-baked goody out of the cupboard, would go off into the woods with it to escape being observed not only by his mother but also by his two elder sisters, Raya and Dunya. And he reminded himself at that moment that only yesterday his mother had whipped him for stealing a jam tart, which he did not do at all—and this episode created for him a sense of injustice all the more keen because he had not been punished on previous occasions when he was really culpable and had brazened the thing out by protesting his innocence. After that he somehow realised that he was a *criminal* and had certain rights as such; he tore away from his mother in a furious rage, and began to throw the chairs about the room, and when his mother chased him he ran out of doors, into the woods, and with tears still in his eyes he began to kill all sorts of living things which happened to come his way. Then he suddenly stopped short, as a regret—oh, so poignant!—came upon him; he turned homewards, slowly, sorrowfully; there was a thing like a small mouse gnaw-

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ing, nibbling at his heart, and with each nibble he seemed to move a foot. His mind was filled with dull, sluggish, remorseful thoughts, as with lingering fumes after a rapid blaze. He stole through the hall of the house quietly and up the stairs, he peeped into the children's bedroom and, seeing it empty, he climbed on his bed and, burying his face in the pillow, burst into tears. It was here, in that state, that Afanasya found him, and putting his head on her lap caressed his hair. At last, after much coaxing, he told her what he had done.

"I've killed many living things!"

"What did you kill?"

"A beetle."

"What else?"

"A frog."

"What else?"

"A lady-bird."

"Is that all?"

"A grasshopper."

"Anything else?"

"A dragon-fly. . . ."

Then after a pause:

"And I cut a lizard in two."

"Well, Vanya, you are a little murderer, to kill God's own creatures. But don't you know, to kill a lizard brings bad luck."

At this piece of information Vanya was on the point of bursting into tears again, but on suddenly seeing his mother, who had entered the room unobserved, his little heart closed in and hardened like a firm young bud, and he blurted out defiantly:

"I don't care if it does!"

"Oh, Vanya!" exclaimed both women at the same time.

But Vanya hardened himself, and remained obdurate to both women who had given him his existence, one by her blood, the other by her milk. He had felt himself

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bound to these two in some unaccountable way, and was in any event too young to have understood, even if he had seen them, the words of the Arabian poet:

"Pity the mother who yieldeth up her child to another woman's breast, she yieldeth up half of her inheritance.

"Blessed the child who hath partaken of the milk of a fine stranger, for he beareth within him the blood of two mothers."

Gradually, under the caressing hands of his mother, his heart opened out again, petal-like, and a warmth began to suffuse it gently, like the warmth of a spring sun, and this warmth little by little became, as it were, a tender fluid, and spread in all directions in so many rivulets, warming him from head to foot as he lay there so quiet and still against his mother's heart without a word or a movement, eyes closed.

Vanya suddenly opened his eyes, expecting to find his mother there. Instead, his eyes fell upon his German book, open where he left it open. Once more he scanned the Russian phrases which he had to put into German. He slowly repeated to himself:

"The cheese of the king is pretty."

Then in German:

"Der Käss von der Kaiser ist schön."

The next phrase was:

"Will they sell their hen to her father?"

He began again:

"Wollen sie verkaufen . . ."

He put the book down again, and went over to the window to catch flies. He caught quite a number, tore off their wings, and putting a tumbler over them watched them walk wingless. Or he tipped their legs into ink and watched them make a trail across the white paper he had torn out of his exercise book. Then seized with pity and remorse for his acts, he tried to palliate his of-

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fence by arguing to himself in its justification, quite in the manner of elders:

"After all, I haven't any wings, have I? Yet I manage to get along somehow. And even if I had wings, mamma or Gombarov or Afanasya or Raya or Dunya or even Rivka," he thought at that moment of the nice jam tarts and cherry dumplings that Rivka made, "would tear them off, or I should be allowed to have them only on Sunday. And anyway, I'm shut in here just as under a glass and I've got to dip my pen into the ink and scrawl on paper something that I don't want to scrawl just as I've made that fly do."

But somehow Vanya, quite like a good many elders, felt a flaw in his reasoning, for once he ceased reasoning, his pity and remorse returned.

But what was worse than the return of pity and remorse was the return of his tutor, whose footsteps he now heard in the hall.

The tutor, however, would have his lunch first, so that Vanya had still twenty minutes left. But in spite of his desperate efforts he managed to learn only nine or ten sentences out of eighteen which were to be translated into German; all the difficult ones which he failed to master he underlined with a pencil.

Then came in Boris Lvovitch, a young man of thirty, amiable and smart-looking, with turned-up moustaches, which seemed like two sign-posts, directing your attention upward to the formidable forehead and saying: "Look what a fine high forehead I've got." But Vanya was not to be diverted by this ruse from what was his tutor's real distinction for him, namely, a gold tooth, and almost every time the tutor opened his mouth, Vanya watched it with fascinated interest.

"Well, Vanya, have you studied your lesson?"

"Y-yes," said Vanya with some hesitation, as he caught sight of a gleam of that tooth. He took up his

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book and began to read off the German sentences, translating them quite easily into Russian as he went along. When he came to the Russian sentences he translated them with great hesitation and was prompted now and then by the master. After translating what he had learnt he stopped short.

"Is that all?" asked Boris Lvovitch.

"Yes . . ." replied Vanya awkwardly.

"That's strange," observed the tutor, "those translation exercises seem to be getting shorter and shorter instead of longer and longer. Let me see the book."

Poor Vanya handed the book to Boris Lvovitch, who looked at it with visibly growing amazement, and Vanya, watching his tutor's face, with agitated eyes, thought that his master's moustaches had grown longer and his forehead higher as in a rounded silver-plated dish. He did not have much time to indulge in this fancy, for the master, running over the previous pages and noticing the same tell-tale marks, turned upon the boy, and with a wide flourish of his arm struck him in the face with the open palm of his hand.

Vanya's eyes were dry and he stood there without stirring, and he neither cried out nor said a word, and his left cheek glowed an eloquent red. There were only two things which appeared to live in the room: the clock and Vanya's heart—or was it only one?—it was as if the pendulum reached out towards Vanya and pounded his back with ponderous strokes.

Boris Lvovitch soon roused Vanya from his stupor.

"Vanya, I'll tell you what I'll do," he said in a tone of reconciliation, "I'll come back here in a half hour, perhaps you will know your lesson by then."

Indeed, by the time the master returned Vanya could say in half tolerable German that the cheese of the king was pretty, that the queen had fifteen shirts and one hat, that the queen's daughter had seven cats and four dogs,

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that one of the cats swallowed her nightingale which could sing better than the rooster, that the rooster crowed at dawn, and that the clock struck twelve at noon, and that the left window of the soldier's widow's cottage was small and would not let the sun in, because the sun was on the other side, and other edifying information usually found in our textbooks for studying foreign languages.

The master was pleased with Vanya and gave him a silver pencil, and Vanya was pleased with the pencil and ran home to show it to everyone and to tell them that he had got it for knowing his German lessons.

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CHAPTER III

VANYA MEETS WITH A TRAGIC ACTRESS IN THE WOOD

RIVKA, the cook of the Gombarovs, was a good soul, such a good soul.

A woman of about thirty, tall and somewhat gaunt, and with a face slightly pock-marked, she was not much to look at, poor girl! Not at the first glance, anyway. She had weak lungs. But she had a stout heart, a fine heart, an oven of fire—to judge by the constant gleam in her eyes, a warm soft gleam that sometimes burst into little flickering flames and sometimes into quick shooting sparks as when in the dark iron strikes stone. But that was only when she was a little angry at one thing or another—for she would never tell why. Perhaps she herself did not know why she was angry. Perhaps she was not really angry but morose, a marked soul upon whom the afflictions of the world swooped down in a flock to feed out of hand like tame pigeons. And there were also times when the fire of her heart blazed out on her tongue, and her words came pouring out like live embers, and her long thin arms, their sleeves rolled up above the elbows, moved like the agitated arms of a marionette, an individual string to every finger. After this transformation the flame would die down, she would become docile again, at times almost lifeless, ready as it were to be put back like a marionette into a box, or was it into a coffin? She was like a tragic actress, a Jewess like Rachel. She put all her art into her dishes and transformed the simplest dish into a work of art.

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She made a most delicious cold beet-root soup, red like a rich wine and covered over with a layer of thick white cream, and the most delicious cherry dumplings, through the fine skin of which the red-black juice oozed out as from some passionate tropical fruit, and other things which simply begged to be eaten—as if anyone needed to restrain you from eating them.

Rivka had been in the Gombarov household for years and she was kept on in spite of her eccentricities, and she had two in particular. One was to drop her work in a sudden whim, even in the midst of preparing a dinner, and to go off to Kieff for some unknown reason. The other was to keep ready a jug partly filled with soaked sulphur matches, for she always threatened to commit suicide by swallowing the fluid: she had done this for years and so no one took the threat seriously.

Rivka had a husband, the village cobbler Yankel, a man of good heart and great piety, but of no distinction. His boots were like other cobblers' boots, each boot had one sole and one heel, and a nail more or less, a small matter.

A morning never to be forgotten by Vanya was a morning in midsummer when he and Rivka went out into the woods together. They walked a long time, such a long time, until they came to a small glade full of tall grass, fragrant and delicious to lie in. Vanya threw himself on the grass and sprawled out on his back, while Rivka went on farther; she promised to come back for him.

Vanya lay there a long time and looked at the patch of blue so high above his head, a patch of blue which contracted or widened with every slight recurring breeze; the trees around him were so tall and so straight and they swayed before every gust like the taut strings of a harp touched by unseen fingers, and their rustling melody was as rhythmical and as sad and as monotonous

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as an old folk song. Then there were the silences between the rustlings. They were like the silences that Vanya grew to love later of the calm seas in the sun, between the lappings of the outgoing tides on slowly receding shores—gentle intervals between caresses in which you grew sweetly oblivious or thoughtful. And Vanya lay there and absorbed it all, not alone with his mind but also with his heart, with his whole body, something vibrated down to the tips of his fingers, something like the sap of the earth poured itself down his tired little legs. He became reflective. Was he alive? he asked himself, or was he a part of the earth, a blade of grass? a tree? a beetle? a little white cloud like the one that just made its appearance above his head?

But Vanya soon roused himself. Or rather he was soon roused by something. It all came about so suddenly—the disappearance of the sun, the rolling of a black curtain across the sky, the agitation of the trees. From afar came a rumble of thunder. Vanya stood up and looked around him. Where was Rivka?

"Rivka! Rivka!" he called frantically.

"Riv-v-kah! Riv-v-kah!" came the answering cry of some mocking wood-demon, whose voice became a prolonged moan in the wind.

Vanya was frightened and began to run. He then realised that he had lost his way. In the meantime the sky grew still blacker and the wind increased, so that the tall trees no longer rocked gently but swung like a ship's masts in a storm, or like tall thin reeds which as they swung crossed and recrossed one another, and their song was no longer a gentle music but a frenzied tune played by a witch who had seized the harp's strings and tore at them and thumped on them furiously. Vanya now ran one way, now another and only stopped now and then to cry:

"Rivka! Rivka!"

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Then as he ran he came upon a larger glade and here he saw a sight which for a moment held him still.

He saw Rivka emerge from the wood, running, her hair all dishevelled, flying before the wind, like the tops of the trees, or as it were with them. She looked very much like a Fury with wriggly serpent-like hair that he had once seen in the reproduction of an old Italian picture; a Fury with gleaming eyes just unloosened from a chain and herself haunted and pursued by the elements filling the background of the picture with blackness, ill-omen and strife.

But all this he thought of only later. At that moment he was very much frightened, and stood still in his fear. She ran past him without seeming to see him. It was then that he recovered himself and ran after her, calling her name:

"Rivka! Rivka!"

The storm soon passed, and as he reached the house at last the sun came out, nature was docile again—like Rivka, who now stood quietly on the back porch peeling potatoes for dinner.

This episode sunk deep into Vanya and stirred within him a thought as yet unborn. That picture of Rivka in the woods was to become for him more and more an image of life itself, life with her changing moods, life once docile now run amuck, life the tragic actress singing her mad songs, life the ailing woman exercising her whims upon men—now once more smiling against a background of sunlight and softly rustling trees.

It was hard to say when this thought first came into his head. Perhaps it came much later; perhaps it was at the time merely sleeping quietly, gasping in its half-conscious travail—not really a full-grown thought but a thought in the process of birth. And in recalling this episode in later years John Gombarov would knit his eyebrows for a long while and he would seem to turn

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his eyes to an inward scrutiny as if he were trying to ferret out a memory from one particular cell of his brain. But as it was useless he would give up the enigma. And his agitated face would lose its agitation and it would lapse into its abstract smile as if a mask of dream were being drawn down tightly over its features. And he would give way to a reflection:

"All life is said to be a dream, but what is more like a dream than one's childhood looked back upon? Certain things have happened, and you have a feeling that they have happened in a perfect sequence, yet on waking you remember some of the things, but the sequence of them is gone. We live in the present, but all dream and all beauty seem to be connected with the past, nearly always with the past. Memories are like myths, and where there are no memories there is no beauty. It is the same with peoples as with individuals. Walking past old places and living near them, they recall their youth. The land of milk and honey, Athenian culture, the Italian Renaissance, the Elizabethan Age—everything is a dream. And only stray dream figures walk among the ruins—Christ, Æschylus, Michelangelo, Shakespeare—and then there are the ruins themselves—which remind us that our dream has been once a reality. For there is nothing new, there is only eternal renewal. There must be ghosts at our elbows, ancient demons to whisper in our ears the one secret worth knowing. . . . But I was talking about Rivka and how things get mixed up in a dream. Perhaps there really was no Rivka, and it was all a dream, a myth? As in a vision, I see her walking among the ruins of my childhood, a lonely figure smiling a little with her mad eyes, in whose gleam I seem to see a striving to recall old forgotten things, things perhaps of her own childhood, her childhood passed under an ancient sun on the Ganges or the Nile, many hundreds of years ago."

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CHAPTER IV

STEPFATHER GOMBAROV TELLS A STORY ABOUT A CURIOUS SECT, AND REVEALS HIS OWN CHARACTER

THE Gombarovs were "emancipated Jews." That is to say, they not only enjoyed certain privileges of the Russian law to which they were entitled by their professional and material standing but they had a relative disregard of certain prohibitions of the Jewish law. They had small religion, but the little they had was practical. They circumcised all their males because they presumed it was healthier, they ate *Kosher* meat because the idea of "eating blood" was abhorrent to them, and they did not eat pig because that animal wallowed in dung. Indeed they looked upon Moses not as upon a divine lawgiver but as upon a kind of sanitary inspector, who had used the name of Jehovah in order to impress upon as yet a young, credulous, malleable people a morality of gregariousness and a sanitary system, the observance of which entitled the observer not to a future life but to a *long life!*—and again they had looked upon him as upon one who, had he lived in our own day, might have been the president of an ethical society, a zealous eugenist, an organiser of model factories, model soup kitchens, garden cities, an inventor of improved drain pipes, a suppressor of tramps, hawkers and image-makers—artists! The Gombarovs almost completely ignored the hundreds of small observances, customs and ceremonies which have grown up around the Jewish religion since the dispersion, like barnacles on an old ship.

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They did not keep separate china for meat and milk dishes, and they did not have a *mezuzoth* * on the door post to keep away the evil spirits, and they visited God's house only when the fancy pleased them, as they would the house of a neighbour with whom they had no particular quarrel. They had, on the other hand, perhaps unconsciously, a religion of race, that pride of survival of a race which has suffered through many generations and has outlived its tormentors—at any rate, God has kept His promise, such as it was, and has given His people a long life if a miserable one, and thus also the idea of long life broke its own bounds and ceased being in that sense a thing material and virtuous, the possession of an individual, and became rather a mystic force, a living fluid running down the spine of the race, giving strength to stooped backs and to narrow chests; in short, making of this race a people whose peculiarity was that their necks grew stiffer in proportion as their chests grew narrower.

This subject of race gave rise to many discussions in the house especially when Professor Malinov—familiarly Dmitry Alekseyevitch—came for dinner. Malinov was a celebrated young chemist who enjoyed talking on his subject with the elder Gombarov, who was making some experiments at the time. But the conversations nearly always drifted to other subjects. Sometimes Gombarov told a story. And Vanya sometimes sat there very quietly and listened.

"You often astonish me," said Malinov one day at the conclusion of a scientific discussion. "Here you are, a man without any training in a technical school or university, and here am I, a man with all the advantages modern education can give and have two or three degrees and two or three medals, and yet I never come to you but you propound to me some original and profound

* Mezuzoth=Sacred Hebrew texts on parchment encased in zinc.

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problem in a subject in which I am presumed to be something of an authority. If you were not a Jew you would be a celebrated man in Russia. I dare say your own peculiar Oriental imagination is helpful even in chemistry. As a scientist I can have no prejudice against Jews, indeed as a scientist I can only have a predilection for them. I sometimes wish they were amalgamated with the Russians. Chemically speaking, a drop of Jewish blood goes a long way. Ethically speaking, however, our Russian, or shall I say our Christian imagination is superior to the Jewish, in the ratio that the quality of mercy is a more imaginative quality than justice, which is a purely logical quality. It was a materialist who said 'an eye for an eye' and 'a tooth for a tooth'; it was a poet who said, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' The austere logic of the Jewish mind has invented retribution and compensation, short life and long life; you promise so little; there is not a single mention of future life in your Old Testament; as against this the Christian mind has devised punishment and reward, hell and heaven, but this Christian imagination reaches its crescendo in offering special inducements to the sinner who has repented. . . ."

"Yes, you do make a great deal of that one lost sheep," interrupted Gombarov, with a touch of irony in his voice, "perhaps it is for that reason that it prefers to stay lost. And it's always the prodigal son who gets the fatted calf. As for promises of future life, one might as well become a Turk. A good Turk, as we all know, is promised sixty-four beautiful young girls, a precise and definite promise, but we have never been told what the Christian heaven is like and how good Christians enjoy themselves."

Professor Malinov seemed to enjoy Gombarov's outburst. He grew paradoxical:

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"What I wanted to lead up to was that if you Jews had a faith like ours you might enjoy your martyrdom, you would have the supreme consolation, of believing yourselves destined for heaven and your tormentors doomed to eternal punishment."

Gombarov laughed and said:

"The last part of this consolation might be denied us by the repentant sinner clause. As you must know, a man usually repents on his death-bed. So that the sinner gets both, he not only enjoys his sin but there is such a rejoicing in heaven over his coming into the fold that he gets all the best things there, too."

"That only proves my point," said Malinov. "You Jews are such a sad, solemn people that you get neither the one nor the other. You are so confoundedly logical and have such a keen sense of justice—or shall I say injustice?—that you are always resentful, always brooding about your wrongs. One can see it in your eyes, which are even sadder than Russian eyes. No matter how much a Jew may look unlike a Jew I can always tell a Jew by his eyes."

"*Goluth* eyes," said Gombarov.

"What is that?"

"Eyes of exile. They are the sort of eyes with which the first Jewish captive must have beheld Rome. It was in Rome that the Jews were walled in within the first ghetto and it was there that they first assumed the yellow gaberdine and the cowering stoop before the 'Hep! Hep! Hep!' of the Roman. It was even worse in Christian Rome than in pagan Rome. After all, what do you expect? For it is truly said that every country has the Jews it deserves. There is Spain. Spain was a great country and the Jews were a great happy people there until Ferdinand and Isabella and the Inquisition forced them into exile again. By one of those strange coincidences in the same year that Abarbanel, an eighty-year

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old man, the Jewish Minister of Finance, left Spain at the head of eighty thousand exiles, Columbus discovered America, and oddly enough there is said to have been a Jewish sailor with the expedition—for there is an adage among us Jews that God provides a remedy at the very time that he inflicts the disease. Whether that drop of Jewish blood that you speak of acts as a tonic or a taint —and most of you think it a taint—depends upon yourselves. The Jews are in fact like a violin, whose tune is sad or gay, saintly or diabolic, according to the player. You spit at a man and expect a 'Thank you,' you are astonished when instead of blessing you he curses you —usually under his breath, because with your intensive justice of heaven and hell you are not content with condemning him to an eternal cauldron of hot tar in afterlife, but also insist upon giving him a foretaste of it in this life. After all, concrete justice is better than abstract mercy. So do not be astonished that a Jew has to instruct his boy: 'Remember that you are not only a man, but also a Jew,' by which he means that he must bear a double burden, must gird himself to win success under a handicap."

"That seems only fair," laughed Malinov, "if it was not for that handicap I might be out of a job."

"Have you heard of the Hassidim?" asked Gombarov and, receiving a nod in the negative, went on:

"The Hassidim are a Jewish sect, remnants of which are still scattered through Russian Poland and Galicia. The remarkable thing about them is that they are not only the most religious of all Jews but also the most joyous. You would call them Dionysians, and yet they are quite like children, if elder people can ever be like children. They consider joy as a kind of duty and the man who does not enjoy life as a kind of sinner. Although they are very pious and spend a great deal of time in prayer yet they are fine scholars and devote many hours

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to the study of their own peculiar theology, full of strange problems and enigmas and not a few jests, some of them at God's expense—for they well argue that if a man have a sense of humour how much more God, who has made man in His own image and embodies all our human virtues in divine perfection, and who, in His infinite mercy, would not only forgive but even enjoy a jest at His own expense, provided it were a good one. With them theology is not theology but a fine art, a thing complex with nuances and worth arguing out in a chain of ifs and enigmas as profoundly logical as a problem in Euclid or a Socratic dialogue. But they are not all solemn, but are more like children playing at a game, and he is most learned who can propound most enigmas. And a distinguished scholar among them, be he young or old, is much honoured, and as such a person is compelled to spend much time over his old Hebrew books the community looks with a lenient eye upon his foibles and comparative neglect of family responsibilities, which as you may guess makes a woman's lot rather hard—for among Hassidim I ought to tell you a man is a man at fourteen, and it is the man unmarried, and therefore not the father, who is likened to a murderer, as one who has foregone and killed the children he might have begotten. That will give you an idea of their *reductio ad absurdum* reasoning. At the same time it has its advantages, in this case affirmation of life, and I may tell you that not a little of their time is given up to revels, to rejoicing, to wine drinking and to dancing. You have spoken of the Jews as a sad people, and I have told you about the Hassidim to show the capacity of the Jews for joy. No one can really know the Jews who does not know the Hassidim. I am the son of a Hassid myself and I know."

Then Gombarov told a story:

"When I grew to manhood—that is when I reached

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my fourteenth year—I decided that I wanted to see something of the world. So one day, saying nothing to anyone, I set out with my little bundle, which contained in addition to a pair of socks and a shirt, a prayer book, a commentary on the Talmud, a book on mathematics, a praying shawl and phylacteries, and two crusts of bread covered with dripping. I had also in a knot of my bandanna handkerchief fifty copecks in small change, which I extracted from my mother's meagre purse, not without some compunction, but I consoled myself by reasoning out that, after all, the money saved by my absence —for I consumed bread without earning it—would in the long run more than compensate for what I had taken, a munificent sum let me tell you in the eyes of such poor people as my parents.

"I started out at dawn and walked nearly all day, taking fields and by-roads and skirting all the near villages, for I was known for miles around as a young scholar and I did not wish to be seen. It was dark by the time I got to a little village, which I did not know and which did not know me. I went straight to the little synagogue, and a synagogue, unlike a Christian church house or a synagogue of Reformed Jews, is always open. It is indeed among such people as the Hassidim not only a house of worship but a university. The part where the services were held was still dark, but there was another door near the entrance, a ray of light poured through the big keyhole, and I could hear voices on the other side of the door. Without knocking I boldly opened the door, and found myself in a large dingy room, such as usually is attached to every synagogue. The furniture consisted only of two long unpainted tables and benches. Books of all sizes, mostly in dark brown bindings with gilt titles and decorations, covered one wall. There were several bronze candlesticks on one table and the candles were lit. Three

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tomes lay open on the table and three middle-aged Jews in black velvet skull caps sat poring over them, their long beards almost brushing the pages, as they swayed their bodies from side to side. One of them was carrying on an argument in the customary sing-song voice, which always rose at the 'if' and fell at the 'ergo,' the same as the long rigidly pointed thumb of his right hand, which cut a curve from the shoulder, answering the curve in the voice. They hardly noticed me as I entered and even after I had taken down a tome from the shelves and sat down at the other end of the table. But I listened rather than read, and waited patiently for the man to end. No sooner did the man end his sing-song than another was ready to take it up. He had already opened his mouth and lifted his thumb in order to begin but I, waiting for this chance, intercepted him by greeting the three of them.

"'*Sholem aleikhem,*' said I, which is our usual form of greeting and means, 'Peace be to you.'

"'*Aleikhem sholem,*' replied he who had just finished speaking.

"But the man who was just about to begin was annoyed at the interruption and said to me:

"'Now run away, little boy, and don't interrupt your elders, your mother is looking for you somewhere, she has just uncovered her breast to give you suck.'

"I was indeed quite small, and looked even younger than my young years, but I was a sharp blade in my way and had had experience with men of that type. Moreover, I must have been rather audacious. And so I turned to the man who had spoken and said to him:

"'If the milk in my mother's withered breast has grown as thin as the wit on your evil tongue then indeed my place is neither here nor there, and I might as well betake myself to a place where wisdom flows like a rich milk from a healthy young mother's breast and

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where men's tongues do not bark from their mouths like chained dogs from their kennels.'

"'He's quite a *lamdun*'—that is a scholar—said the third man, who had not yet spoken, smiling.

"'Come here, young *azus ponim*,'—that is brazen face —'and we'll try you out on some tricks,' said the man to whom I addressed my remarks, but who did not seem offended at all. 'Now tell us about the book that God looked into when he created the world.'

"'That book was written by Satan,' answered I.

"'By Satan? How came that book to be written by Satan?'

"'It happened in this way. In the beginning there were only God and Satan. God was good and wise and Satan was evil and subtle and hid his evil by his subtlety. Satan was eloquent and knew how to use words, so he wrote a book full of subtlety, a book containing a plan of the world, and showed it to God. God read the book and thought it very beautiful, but He objected to certain passages, which He thought were immoral, and so He expurgated them and suggested other changes which Satan agreed to quite readily. For Satan knew well the evil masked by his beautiful words. Then God created the world. And He must have recognised that there was something wrong with it on the very first day . . .'

"'God can do no wrong,' interrupted one of my listeners.

"'I am coming to that. . . . For it is said in our *Torah* that "God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness." You will note that God thinks the light good, and that nothing is said about the darkness except that it was divided from the light, even as evil is divided from good. Again, Satan flattered God when he suggested that God make man in His own image, but when God made Adam and

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gave him Eve and put them both in the Garden of Eden, Satan sent a serpent to tempt them to eat the fruit of the tree of good and evil. You must mark this: Why did Satan choose this tree and not the tree of life? And why did God Himself bar their way afterward to the tree of life? It is very clear: Both God and Satan thought that Adam was now half like themselves, and that if he ate of the tree of life, he would be as powerful as one or the other, according to whether the good or the evil prevailed. God saw that, for His own sake, it was good for man to contend with evil, and Satan saw that it profited him that man should contend with good, for Satan's joy is not in evil itself but in the tempting of man away from good, and a deep-dyed sinner is like a sheep already in the fold. It is always the stray sheep that interests either God or Satan. Neither God nor Satan could do anything with anyone who had eternal life. And that is why there is eternal contention between light and darkness, good and evil, and man is torn between God and Satan.'

"This started a whole chain of argument, and I shall not go into the details of it, but go on with my story. After the argument I went in with them to the evening service, and at the end of it one of my new acquaintances asked me if I knew anyone in the village, and receiving a negative answer he invited me to his house for dinner and to a night's lodging. 'Indeed,' he added, 'you cannot do better than remain in our village, there is always room for a *lamdun*.'

"And in this manner I went from village to village, from small town to small town, living on my wits, and being asked to stay everywhere for the rest of my days, so much is a scholar honoured among my people. But my supreme adventure happened in a little Hassidic community not far from Plotsk. You will think I dreamt it so incredible will it sound to you.

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"One early afternoon I arrived with my little bundle at a little village, and as usual I was making my way toward the synagogue. I was already within sight of the building, which I recognised because of the small groups of the capoted Jews who stood talking and gesticulating at the door. I had not yet got there when a middle-aged woman, rather short and stout, a shawl over her head, a kind of rope-girdle across her smock to bear false witness to a waist-line, and looking altogether like a sack of potatoes rather than a human being, limped over toward me and, to my astonishment, fell upon my neck, with the words:

" 'Oh Mott'l, my long-lost Mott'l, so you have come back to me!'

"The shock was too great for me and her short thick arms, more like a baby's legs in shape than a woman's arms, clung round my neck and almost stifled me, but at last I managed to gasp out:

" 'Woman, I'm neither Mott'l nor lost, and as I have never seen you before I cannot be coming back to you.'

" 'Oh Mott'l, oh you shameless young man,' she cried, still holding on to me with all her might, 'don't you know your own mother, Sossya, who fed you at her own breast, gave you her blood, underslept herself whole nights, famished herself, starved herself, that you, my own pretty little finger, might . . .'

" 'Woman,' I cut her short,—she still held on grimly to my coat, though she released my neck—'woman,' I said, 'my name is not Mott'l but Shimoyn, Shimoyn ben Naphtali,'—that is Semyon son of Naphtali—for we still use among ourselves the old Biblical patronymic—'and my mother's name,' I went on, 'is not Sossya but Dvossya; as for your starving yourself—I may tell you that if my mother, God's blessings upon her, were half as stout as you, she would still be twice as big as she is. Now let me go my way.'

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"In the meantime a crowd had gathered, word was passed round that the good widow Sossya's long-lost son Mott'l, who had disappeared three years ago when they lived in another village and the *lamdun* Shloimo, his father—blessed be his memory—was yet alive, had come back, and the crowd which looked upon this return as a miracle from God was not to be robbed of its pleasure and excitedly murmured among themselves and urged me not to be an *azus ponim*—a brazen-face—and to be a dutiful son. But as I still went on arguing and protesting, two young and brawny, red-cheeked Hassidim stepped out of the crowd and jostled me by my small shoulders in the direction of the widow's house, the widow limping along, followed by the excited crowd. I walked on timidly, having decided that it was more politic for the moment to play the part of Mott'l, widow Sossya's long-lost son. At the door of the widow's house I was met by three little brats, presumably my newly-found brothers and sisters, who, on seeing their mother and the strange procession, began to screech and to whimper as if Noah's Deluge were upon them.

" 'Oh my dear little lambkins, my sweet little birdies,' she cried, trying to calm them, 'greet your little brother Mottele.'

"But upon seeing me they grew only more terrified, and they set up a yell, such as you would not expect to hear before Judgment Day. By this time, however, I entered into the spirit of the adventure, and decided that I would humour my captors until such a time as I could get away. And so, taking out of my pocket a small bag of raisins, with which I had luckily provided myself, I gave a small handful to each. The effect was wonderful and instantaneous. They stopped at once, almost in the middle of their cry, as if their throat machinery had suddenly slipped a cog. The widow was delighted, the crowd was profoundly impressed as if I had per-

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formed a miracle. I made a grave face and laughed inwardly. In a single day I had found a mother and three little brothers and sisters. How would it all end? Then a terrifying thought came to me: perhaps I had even a young wife living there, an *aguno,* for that is our special name for a wife who has been deserted by her husband. But immediately afterward I reflected that if I had I should have heard of it earlier. In any case, I decided that I would see the thing through. Besides, there was nothing else to be done.

"Seeing me in acquiescent mood the crowd departed, and I was left to the mercy of the widow and her little brats. After a repast I was visited by a deputation of three, who took me to the rabbi's house, where I was questioned about the Torah and the Talmud and so distinguished myself that I won the praise of my elders. I was particularly inspired on the subject of the Sambatyon River, a river not on any map, and the peculiarity of which is that it ceases to flow on the Sabbath, wherefor it is highly regarded by all pious Jews.

" 'You are a worthy son of Shloimo the *lamdun,*' said the rabbi.

" 'A true son of Shloimo the *lamdun,*' chimed in a second Jew.

" 'Only Shloimo himself could have expounded the subject in so worthy a manner,' added a third.

"In the meantime, as I learned later, the women of the village were not idle. Everywhere they were cooking and baking things for the evening feast to be held at the rabbi's house to celebrate my return, all the more since I was such a *lamdun.*

"I was used to Hassidic feasts, yet never in my life, before or since then, have I witnessed such a lavish and joyous feast as at the rabbi's house that night. The long table under the low ceiling was spread with a beflowered orange-red tablecloth, tasselled at the corners,

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and all sorts of good things, mostly of a spicy sort, covered it, for the Jews love spices. There were many original dishes of which I cannot now remember the names. There were several cut-glass decanters filled with wine. There were three candelabra, one at each end of the table and one in the middle, each containing seven candles. There were two musicians, one with a fiddle, the other with an accordeon, and during dinner they rested their instruments upon two small kegs of wine, which stood up on two boxes. The women had put on their best clothes and had on spangles and beads and earrings, the elder ones had bright silk kerchiefs on their heads. The men and the women were mostly divided into separate groups. Here there was a cackle as of hens, there a droning hum as of bees. The rabbi himself sat in a large arm chair at the head of the table propped up on several pillows. He had his orange-coloured handkerchief tied round his waist.

"The feast was begun by the rabbi pronouncing the customary blessing over the wine. Then the wit and entertainer of the village, a very short, almost dwarf-like man, but very broad across the shoulders, with a big ruddy face and a still redder nose, the bulb of which attracted the candlelight, and with a long besom-like beard which reached almost to his navel, stood up and chanted a mock prayer, a parody of a well-known Jewish prayer, every line of which begins with an 'If' and ends with the phrase: 'even that were enough.'

"'Oh Lord, our God, if Thou hadst done no more than bring us back our long-lost Mottele, son of Shloimo the lamdun, if Thou hadst done no more than that, *even that were enough!*'

"As the evening went on and they drank more wine, they became more and more hilarious. Then the fiddle began to play, a half-sad, half-joyous dance tune, and the women and the girls, lifting their skirts slightly in

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front with both their hands, began to dance. Then the old bearded men and the rabbi himself and the young boys got up from the table and, forming little groups, put one hand on each other's shoulder, and lifting up the other went round and round, stamping their feet and singing. The wit was a wonderful little man. Sometimes he would be joined in some simple little tune like:

Oi, oi, Yidele,
Oi, oi, Yidele,
Tam-tam-tam-tam,
Tam-di-di-tam-tam. . . .

sometimes, in the midst of an awed circle, he would sing a strange song without words. I remember one particularly, in which he did not seem like a man at all, but like a demon. His red face was redder than ever, every line in it was intoxicated, distorted with demoniac joy, his eyes had an extraordinary gleam, he half lifted one arm and one leg of his squat figure, and pursed up his lips into a kind of a circle, out of which issued sounds as of the wind blowing, the wind rising and dying down, the wind moaning in despair and the wind crying with joy, and it was all the more wonderful because all these sounds were organised into a dance melody, which he danced by turning his figure slowly from side to side in a semi-circle, now uplifting one arm and one leg now the other.

"At intervals the music and the songs would cease and the crowd would return to the table to eat and to drink and to make jests. I was the victim of quite a number of these, one of which might have proved embarrassing to me if I were not half-intoxicated myself. The subject of my return was being discussed jovially, when one longbeard remarked:

"'If you waited until Messiah came'—this ironical expression has crept into our speech because we still

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expect our own true Messiah and we don't expect him very soon—'if you waited until Messiah came', repeated the speaker, 'you would not find another such *azus ponim* as our Mottele, only our Mottele could have denied his own mother, if he were not such a *lamdun* . . .'

" 'You blasphemer,' I said quick as a shot, 'you've just called Messiah an *azus ponim*.'

"Everyone laughed, but my triumph was short, for my accuser went on:

" 'But it was no use your denying, Mottele, for I was present at your circumcision, and I know that you have a peculiarity . . . '

"A shout of laughter went up. Someone cried:

" 'Undress him! Let us see!'

"The women were quickly bundled out of the room. I could hear their chuckles on the other side of the door. Several strong hands seized me. My resistance was useless. I was undressed and examined. My peculiarity was a common one, and they made much of it; in any case, they did not need much convincing that I was the real Mott'l. Then, having finished the examination, they quite suddenly began to sing and to dance and whirled me along with them just as I was. When they had exhausted themselves they resumed their places at the table and as I was getting into my clothes again I could hear someone saying:

" 'It is true, Mottele has a peculiarity, but my daughter Serele has also one, you needn't ask me what it is . . . '

" 'That sounds like a match,' said the rabbi.

" 'I should be very proud to give my daughter to such a lamdun as Mott'l. She is the most beautiful girl in our village.'

" 'Bring Serele in,' someone shouted.

"The door was then opened and the women rushed in laughing. Serele was quickly singled out and I was introduced to her as her intended husband. The room

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was in an uproar. She was an extremely pretty girl with cheeks like apples and with wonderful black hair; she was worth marrying for her hair alone. But as, with embarrassment, I was contemplating her cheeks and her hair, the horrible thought quite suddenly struck me: her beautiful hair would be cut off after marriage and it would be replaced with a wig, for such is the custom among this people. As my sudden consternation revealed itself for a moment on my face, my intended father-in-law turned to me and asked:

"'What is the matter? Is the bride too beautiful?'

"'Only don't forget, Mottele, to put your right foot on her left one when you are under the canopy, if you want to be master of your own house,' whispered the widow Sossya, my newly-found mother, in my ear.

"We were both congratulated. Of course, the matter was considered settled. But I shall not linger on with the story. It was three o'clock in the morning when widow Sossya took me home and put me to bed with the three little brats on top of the oven; she herself lay down at the foot of it. I lay there perhaps for an hour, thinking. When I heard the widow snore I knew it was time to get to work. I climbed down very cautiously and, with my heart breathless, managed to step over her without disturbing her. I found my little bundle, and opened the window with some difficulty. No sooner I was on the ground than the window fell down with a slam. I ran as fast as I could. Presently I thought I heard cries behind me, and I ran still faster. I passed a desolate house on the road. Someone seemed to stick his head out of a window and cried to me:

"'Mottele, come and have some pancakes with me.'

"I was frightened, and I still seemed to hear cries behind me. I then came to a river and plunged in and swam across. Only then I breathed a sigh of relief. And that is the whole story."

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There was a moment of silence when Gombarov finished.

"A most incredible adventure," observed Malinov, "if I did not know the sort of man you are I should not believe it. I am grateful to you for telling it to me, especially since you have revealed to me the Jews' capacity for joy, and have proved your point. I think that was your object."

"Yes," said Gombarov, "and yet it is quite true that the Jew is sad, but his sadness arises from his very capacity for joy, from the suppression of his joy. The Jew is a sensualist, if you will, and his idealism proceeds from his suppressed sensuality. And he is a materialist also, if you like, because it is so easy and pleasant merely to live and have the good things of life—yes, why not?—and yet he has never sacrificed his ideas to his materialism. Indeed, he has become a Christ in denying Christ, for how much easier would his lot be, at any rate in Russia, if he were only willing to give up his idea."

"You speak in paradoxes," said Malinov.

"All life is a paradox. You as a chemist understand what the transmutation of physical objects is. There is also transmutation in the so-called spiritual world. We Jews are forced to transmute our joy into wailing and lamentations, which you hear in our everyday songs and in our prayers and chants in the synagogues, and we do this unwillingly, even unconsciously, for we love life and joy. A land of milk and honey still remains the Jews' ideal. But you, on the other hand, castigate yourselves deliberately, you make self-denial and repentance ends in themselves. The blunt sensuality of Solomon's love 'Song' so annoys you that you read into it a prophetic tribute to the Christian Church, and actually you may be said to transmute the sad view you take of life into a sensual image. But to this day all good Jews permit themselves one day of unrestrained rejoicing—

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the Feast of Purim—and there is even a legend among us that when all feasts and fasts shall have passed away this one day will remain. But Purim will be here in a few days, and if you like I will take you to the synagogue and show you bearded Jews dancing around with scrolls in their hands and little boys dancing among them in hats of tin-foil and waving all sorts of banners in their hands."

"Thank you," said Malinov, "I shall be glad to see the gay sight. As it is, I am indebted to you for an instructive afternoon."

Vanya, who sat there all the time, listening, was even more grateful. The adventure especially fascinated him, and it somehow made him feel more kindly towards his stepfather. And he was glad to hear about Purim, for he loved its gaiety and the delicious Purim cakes.

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CHAPTER V

GRANDFATHER GOMBAROV PLANS A LEISURE VISIT TO HIS SON, BUT DEPARTS IN HASTE

PURIM CAKES, which were three-cornered pastries made of a thin dough filled with ground poppy seed saturated in honey, were Vanya's especial joy, looked forward to with childish anticipation. They were good in themselves, for they were made by Rivka, but doubtless they were made even more palatable for Vanya by his imagination dwelling on their legendary significance,—it being supposed that Haman, the Jews' enemy, had worn a three-cornered hat. It pleased him even then to reject the more rational explanation of it being a "poppy seed pouch," for such was the meaning if you took the Jewish name for it—"Hamantasche"—apart: "ha" being Hebrew for "the," "man" for poppy seed, and "tasche" being German for pouch.

Gombarov's old father arrived some days before the festival. He had come to spend a month, but spent only three days. He would not have stayed that long had not the Sabbath intervened, for no pious Jew permits himself to travel on the Sabbath. His piety was so thorough that he regarded carrying his bandanna handkerchief about as work and, after the manner of all pious Jews, he wrapped it around his waist as part of his apparel.

He was a small man of about seventy, with a face intense for its long lines of piety, as in the famous Portrait of an Old Man painted by Dürer. His long black capote, which reached the ground, longer in front be-

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cause of the crouch-like stoop of his back, seemed a fit background for the long grey face leaning forward with its long thin grey beard and the traditional long side locks, which emerged from under the black velvet skull cap at the temples and accentuated the pious glitter of his long narrow eyes, these alone hinting at the violence of the last flickers of ecstasy in a body long since dead. He had been a pious Jew so long and he had prayed so long that his swaying forward and back or from side to side had become mechanical, so that now he went on swaying even when his lips were silent; and Vanya looked at him with a furtive curiosity and with that astonishment with which he might have looked upon a violin player who made all the necessary movements with his bow across his instrument yet produced no sound. Once or twice the old man glancing up and catching Vanya's look called the boy to him.

"How much do you know of the Torah?"

Vanya told him. He was up to the book of Joshua.

"How old are you?"

"Eight years," replied Vanya.

"You know too little. At your age I had begun the Talmud. You are a *Shegetz.*"

Vanya was hurt and not a little perplexed. Here was this old man calling him a *Shegetz*—that is a Gentile boy—while the Gentile boys in the village sometimes called him a Jew and "Christ-killer." What was he, then?

But whether or not Vanya was perplexed at his identity, no such dilemma troubled the old man. He was a Jew and he regarded the whole Gombarov household as a pestiferous nest of Gentiles. He had brought with him his whole paraphernalia of piety—his praying shawl, his phylacteries, which he wound round his forehead and his wrists and the leather straps of which left ribbon-like stains across his arms, his books, which he knew almost

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by heart—he referred to the words in them as "ducats," he was storing them up for his future life. Had he brought them all that distance from his native village merely to contaminate them in an ungodly house? He saw that from the very first, when he put his foot on the threshold and looked in vain for the *mezuzoth* on the doorpost which he desired to touch. He was at once led to his bedroom, where on the clean white wall hung a picture, the subject of which was that abomination of all abominations—a pretty girl, with her long hair hanging loosely about her disrobed shoulders, and with lascivious eyes; he trembled upon seeing it and in a rage—a pious old man's rage—he pulled it down from the wall and flung it out of the window on the grass, where Rivka found it later. On the walls of his own house he had a picture of Moses Montefiore, an old engraving of the other more famous Moses splitting the Red Sea, a reproduction of the wailing wall of Jerusalem to which he had always longed to make a pilgrimage, and other pictures of like character.

There were other things which displeased him in his son's house. He was suspicious of the china and kept on asking whether this was a milk plate or that a meat plate. It was the first time he had seen his son's wife and he thought of her as of a "strange woman." He heard her singing Russian songs in the house. And she did not pay him enough honour. How could his son, a scholar, marry such a woman?

It had now become quite clear why the old man stayed three days instead of a month, a short space that might have been even shorter were it not that Sabbath intervened. It cannot be said that the Gombarovs exerted any pressure upon him to prolong his stay. Indeed Vanya's mother threatened to take a holiday if the old man stayed much longer and sang her little songs with greater ardour than usual. There were whisperings in the kitchen and

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plottings in the corners of the house and altogether the house was filled with an atmosphere of strain—as if the old man himself were not eager to go! And on the third day the old man went, to count ducats of holiness in his own pious nest. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

Then another thing occurred on the afternoon which preceded Purim Eve.

Vanya, in a wrangling mood, was standing in the door of the drawing room brandishing a stick and defying Raya and Dunya to pass through. Gombarov, on hearing the sound of the clash of sticks, glanced in through another door, and departed again with an amused smile. He naïvely admired the prowess of the boy keeping off his two elder sisters, Raya being twelve and Dunya ten. He had been a boy himself. The wrangling went on for some time and Vanya still held his ground. Raya, soon tired of the futile struggle, ran before one of Vanya's hard thrusts, and left the room by another door. But Dunya, whom Vanya resembled in features, was not unlike Vanya in temperament, and was determined to go through that door and no other. Several desperate lunges were made on both sides; then Dunya, with a sudden quick thrust, caught Vanya off his guard and delivered a stroke which caught Vanya across the left eye. Vanya gave a scream and dropped his stick. There was a large blue spot under his eye. Dunya ran away and hid herself.

Gombarov, who interfered little in household matters, only laughed at the incident, and Vanya and his mother appointed themselves a court of judgment upon Dunya. It was decided upon Vanya's suggestion to deprive Dunya of her share of Purim cakes, the delicious odour of which came in even at that moment from the pantry.

Vanya appointed himself to watch that the harsh decree should be carried out. No district attorney or police official, or prison warden appointed to execute the

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law, could have kept a more vigilant eye than Vanya his right one—the left one being under a bandage—this eye followed Dunya everywhere, it looked through keyholes, through the chinks of doors, once it caught Dunya in the pantry just in time to make her hand on its way to a Purim cake pause midway, again it detected a surreptitious cake held by Rivka under her apron and frustrated Rivka's effort to smuggle it to Dunya. Vanya was relentless, like the law itself. Not that Vanya's heart did not ache for Dunya, but his no less aching eye and his pride and his stubbornness saw only weakness in surrender, while his brain reasoned that a law was made to be fulfilled.

And so Purim went by without Dunya having any Purim cake. Vanya ate the last one himself, conquering the struggling desire to give it to Dunya. But he no sooner finished eating it than a feeling of repentance, keen and horrible, came upon him. He saw Dunya crying in the corner.

Vanya went up to his room. Something clutched him in his throat and large tears ran down his cheeks. He felt their salt taste on his tongue.

Pity entered his heart and his heart's steel melted before it as before a fierce furnace blaze.

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CHAPTER VI

STEPFATHER GOMBAROV'S OCCUPATIONS—HIS EQUIPMENT AS A TRAGIC CHARACTER

PEOPLE usually are annoyed with a man who has no definite occupation, and they are equally annoyed when they meet such people in books. They like a man who has a regular occupation and regular hours, unless he be a duke or a railway magnate, and have other people work for him. John Gombarov, in his later years, once lent a celebrated Russian novel to an English friend who returned it with the remark, which contained as much disappointment as admiration: "A finely written book, but the people in it do not appear to work. They seem to go in and out when they please. Now in an English novel, say by Arnold Bennett, everybody works." Gombarov smiled grimly at the thought that it never occurred to his friend that these people did nothing but work. This man was a Socialist who had a wife and two children to feed, and it is likely that he regarded the book as a strain on his sense of scientific reality and as an insult to his hard, clear-cut intelligence.

But the matter has still another aspect. John Gombarov himself had one of those peculiar experiences in real life which illuminate a subject as with a flash of lightning. It was during the great war and he was in a train on his way to an English country-town. Opposite him, in his carriage, sat a man in khaki, a sufficiently ubiquitous spectacle in those days to excite no curiosity or comment. But this man was extraordinary somehow

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in the fact that his head was rather large for the narrow torse and shoulders on which it rested and that it topped the khaki garment rather awkwardly, as if one did not belong to the other. Gombarov stealthily watched the soldier's face and concluded that with its luminous eyes it was too dark, too curious and too intelligent to be suppressed by a uniform; indeed, the uniform gave it only a certain distinction of contrast.

"After all," he reflected, "nothing defines so clearly the distinction between a gentleman and a waiter as a dress suit, it is an excellent device for detecting waiters among gentlemen." At the same time, he observed that the soldier watched him also. He was not astonished when the soldier offered him a cigarette and entered into conversation with him. And he was not even astonished when the conversation took a turn uncommon between strangers. The man in khaki, ignoring the weather, the landscape and the war, and all other tedious topics with which a man strikes up a chance acquaintance, began almost at once by describing Gombarov's own character to him; and he did it with a skill and knowledge which might have astonished a man even other than Gombarov, who at that time had grown accustomed to the idea that life was as fantastic as any artistic creation. And yet one slight circumstance astonished even him. It was at the moment of their parting, when it suddenly occurred to Gombarov to ask his acquaintance what his occupation was. "I am almost ashamed to tell you," replied the soldier, "I am a ladies' tailor—of Barnstaple, North Devon."

"After all," pondered Gombarov upon the incident later, "why shouldn't a measurer of women's backs be as well a measurer of men's faces: perhaps in my acquaintance's case, he does this last better than the first. Who knows, he may be even an incipient novelist. We have heard of drapers' clerks turning novelists, why not ladies'

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tailors? How is a nation of shopkeepers to get its novelists if not from its shops? At any rate, my train acquaintance had the decency not to give me any shop talk. That is where my friend to whom I lent that fine Russian novel makes his profoundest mistake. He imagines the book would have contented him if he knew that the men in it had regular occupations. He wholly ignores the fact that men are more interesting when they have no occupations, or have left them, or have irregular ones, or are reactions from the occupations they do have. How can high tragedy have her fling with her eyes on the clocks? Sordidness may produce pathos, seldom tragedy. Tragedy must have a certain freedom, her limbs must be free to walk, she cannot be bothered by time or space, and she pauses only when she has reached the ultimate—the inevitable—her doom. But how can men doomed before they move be tragic characters?—all the more since a tragic character is only tragic by virtue of his striving with circumstances, by the pitting of his will against the will of others, against the will of life itself—in short, he makes his own choice, chooses his own doom. Such a man breaks clocks, makes his own time. His occupation becomes only a secondary thing in his life.

In such a manner, John Gombarov, no longer Vanya, reasoned about things, and a careful listener would have quickly seen that his thought did not ramble or digress but merely widened like a river taking in all the streams and tributaries of experience on its way to the sea. And it was in some such mood as this, tolerant and loving like a river which has left behind the swamps and the morasses and at last beholds the sea, that he, looking backward, tolerant and no longer despising, considered his doomed stepfather and his life and all his occupations and idiosyncrasies, which at one time disturbed not only him but nearly all people who came in contact with that strange man.

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It would be hard to say, standing on one's foot—so to speak, what stepfather Gombarov's occupation was. He had always two or three and he always dropped one to take up another. He was nearly always occupied, but as he went in and out when he pleased—in the manner that annoyed John Gombarov's English friend—the impression he gave in the village was that he did not work at all. One man had seen him at such an hour of the day, another at a different hour, and still another at some other hour. These people came together and ignoring the fact that these hours were on different days came to the one and unanimous conclusion. It would have been more true to conclude that Gombarov was a slave to his work but was master of his own time.

The circumstances of Gombarov's entry into the family as instructor have already been told. He had taught Vanya's elder brother, Feodor, Hebrew and mathematics. But he knew kindred languages as well, such as Syrian and Arabic, which he had taught himself. When Vanya's father—Boris Andreyevitch Semenov—left the house, and Semyon Bogdanovitch Gombarov took his place, he settled on his wife a sum of money, some several thousand roubles, to be used for the education of his children, Raya, Dunya and Vanya. Sofya Konstantinovna Gombarov, in her love and trust of her second husband, transferred to him all her possessions, which gave him an opportunity to exercise his practical mechanical genius, which until then had lain fallow. Practical is perhaps too hard a word, Gombarov's genius was practical only to a point. All this will become only too clear in good time.

Gombarov's first practical venture was poultry. That seems like a simple thing, but Gombarov entered into it with his whole heart and made the problem of the birth of a chick as fascinating to himself as the creation of the world. He studied the matter scientifically, in its every aspect. He sent for every possible book on the subject

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not only in Russia but also in Germany, he studied every make of incubator and brooder, he analysed chemically the egg of every individual hen of every breed, took the periodical temperature of brooding hens as a doctor that of a patient, and after months of experimenting he ended by inventing a new and superior incubator, which approached nearest to the natural birth-giving and healing properties of the mother hen. And Gombarov himself used to say of it: "It can do everything but lay eggs." But surely if a machine could be made to lay eggs Gombarov was the man to make it. Even then he would have to stop somewhere. That was the great trouble with Gombarov. He always did stop somewhere. That is to say, he always stopped when he had exhausted the problem; then he took to something else. He did not even take the trouble, as other men would have done, to sell the patent of his invention to someone else, so that every idea to which he gave birth was no better than a newborn child, which having opened its eyes just long enough to see how wretched the world was had decided not to give it the benefit of its life and closed its eyes again forthwith. Perhaps that was the Oriental in him. A celebrated motorist tells us that when he went through China at eighty miles an hour not a single Chinaman so much as turned his head to look. That of course was rather to be expected of a people which in the long ago invented gunpowder and used it in such an innocent pastime as sky-rockets. It is likely that if the celebrated motorist had not been going at eighty miles an hour but had been lying on his back under his machine looking up at the mechanism the natives might have stopped to look with curiosity at a man who had come several thousand miles and wanted to go still further. Now if Gombarov had invented the motor car he would have taken one short journey, then sent his machine to all the devils. If as a boy he had so satisfactorily explained to himself the

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creation of the world as a concoction mixed by God and the devil, as a man he still retained an interest in every problem insofar as it dealt with *becoming* and not with *being*. He continued to treat the practical affairs of life as though he were still a Hassid and a *lamdun*.

It is all very well to be a Hassid and a *lamdun* when you are dealing with the problem of the creation of the world, but when you are busy creating a family and have several mouths to feed, well, that is quite another matter.

To begin with, Sofya Konstantinovna had five children by her first husband. One of these had died, Fedya was with his father, Raya, Dunya and Vanya were with her. In the five years of her life with Gombarov she gave birth to four more. Two of these had died. There was Katya, a little girl of three, and Ilya, a seven-months-old baby. And she was a prospective mother once more. That again showed Gombarov to be a true Hassid, that is a begetter and not a murderer.

The capital that Sofya Konstantinovna intrusted him with was not large, but like most impractical men Gombarov dreamt of turning it into a huge fortune. When his interest in poultry began to dwindle he bought seven cows, it would be better to say six, for one had the temperament of a bull and tried to kick over the pail almost every time it was milked. No one but Gombarov would have bought that cow, but even if he had known its defects he would have still bought it for the mere purpose of training it, for that was a problem in itself, and Gombarov loved problems. "Precisely because it does not suit others it suits me," he used to say when he went against other people's advice. And other men returned Gombarov's compliment by coming to him for counsel and doing the opposite. They really admired him—in a fashion. This admiration had in it something akin to that of the American farmer, who, upon seeing a goat butting madly into a stone wall, remarked: "Wal, I

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admire your pluck, but goldarn your judgment!" But this was not quite true of Gombarov, who was not butting into a wall but trying to jump over it—to see what was on the other side.

That kind of man was Gombarov.

"You'd think they were the seven wise virgins," said a neighbour, who had observed the care and attention that Gombarov bestowed on his seven cows.

That these were given only to seven foolish cows hinted less at Gombarov's unwisdom than at that quality in him which poets love to call the folly of the wise. He studied the needs of those cows as he had studied earlier those of the hens. Now he let them graze in one kind of a pasture, now in another kind, and tested their milk afterward to note the difference, he bought a new microscope for the purpose and this trifle alone cost him one hundred and sixty-five roubles. He had no time for anything but those seven cows, and their indispositions gave him grave concern. At such moments, moments of preoccupation, no one dared to approach him, not even his wife. But upon one occasion when he was working hard over his microscope Sofya Konstantinovna entered his laboratory and in a faltering voice said that everyone was out and that she needed a string of onions at once. He said nothing, but merely put on his hat and walked out. In a little while he returned with nothing in his hand.

"Where are the onions?" asked Gombarova.

"They'll be here soon," replied Gombarov and reentered his room.

A half hour passed and Gombarova had almost given up hope of the onions ever coming. Then she heard a cart creak through the gate, and presently there was a knock on the kitchen door. She opened the door and found there Kharton, a peasant with a good-natured face.

"*Barinya,** I've brought the onions."

* Lady.

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"Well, where are they? Be quick, the dinner is spoiling."

"Where shall I put them, *barinya?*"

"Put them? Give them here, I want them at once."

"Yes, *barinya,* but I have a whole cart-full as ordered by the master."

Gombarova looked up and to be sure there was a whole cart-full of onions. She was appalled. What was she to do with so many onions? But she ordered them to be unloaded.

That kind of man was Gombarov.

Gombarov ordered a cream-separator from Germany, and he boasted that it was the first one of its kind to be used in Russia. He was in a child-like glee when it arrived and he tested it at once, surrounded by his gaping family. A pail of fresh milk was brought and poured into the top receptacle. Then Gombarov turned the handle, the wheels of the machine began to whir, and the heavy cylinder within flew round with such a powerful centrifugal force that the pivot on which it turned could barely be seen. Then miracle of miracles: a thick white fluid—the cream—began to flow fast out of one spout; a thin, greenish fluid—the skimmed milk—out of another. Here they had delicious sweet cream and the cows had been milked only a half hour before. Vanya half hid behind his mother, the speed of the machine frightened him. And presently something happened which justified his fears. His stepfather was rubbing his hands and talking:

"Ah, those Germans are clever! We Russians are always behind in this sort of thing. Just look at the beauty! No waiting, no watching, no fooling about with jars and jugs, no depending on the weather, and the cream is sweet not sour. Just think of the butter it will make! Rivka, bring another pail of milk!"

"There's no more milk left," said Rivka.

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"What do you mean, there's no milk left?" exclaimed Gombarov. "Here"—he thrust his hand in his pocket and pulled out a five-rouble note—"go and buy up all the milk in the village!"

In a little while there was a procession of peasants with milk pails. Gombarov poured in pail after pail, large drops of sweat ran down his face as with a diabolical fury he turned the handle. Suddenly the machine shook as with a kind of ague, in almost less than an instant the cylinder, jumping up like a badly spinned top, flew with a crashing noise through the window, not only shattering the glass but carrying away the supports. There were screams. Luckily, the heavy projectile flew in the other direction, and no one was the worse for it. Even the machine did not suffer. Gombarov very calmly explained away the accident, which was caused by a screw he had forgotten to tighten.

At the same time he bought a huge butter-churning machine, which consisted of a large barrel hermetically sealed at one end and turning round and round on a kind of pivot leaning on either end on a support. His usual procedure was to pour the milk as soon as the cows had been milked into the cream separator, and immediately afterwards to pour the cream into the churning machine. He looked ardently at the product, which was indeed a fine one.

"Russians have not seen such a butter. Wait till they taste it. Once they do, I shall get orders for it from everywhere. I shan't be able to supply them all."

In such a fashion Gombarov would go on talking to his wife, in order to reassure her. He was planning to make the fortune of the Gombarov house. Yes, he could well afford to spend his small capital now, for every copeck he spent would return to him a hundred-fold. Vanya would be a physician, every girl in the house

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would have a *dot*. There was really nothing to worry about.

"A camel might as well worry about its hump getting smaller when it was almost at the end of its journey and with prospects for replenishing its hump to an unprecedented fatness," argued Gombarov in the parable fashion of his race.

"But Gombarov," ventured his wife timidly, "suppose what the camel sees is only a mirage and it is still hundreds of miles away from its rich pastures."

Gombarov was angry.

"Blessed be the Lord our God for not having made me a woman," he said, repeating the words of the Hebrew prayer, and strode out of the room.

The day arrived, the great day upon which he had decided to take his wonderful butter to Kieff and to startle the Kieffites with it. No, he would not go like others, with a few miserable samples wrapped in glazed paper. He would take a large barrel along in a farmer's cart, and a large wooden spoon, and he would stick that spoon into that bulk of fine creamy fat and say: "Here, try it, it can be eaten without bread, like ice cream." Then as the man ate he would watch his face. "Well, have you tasted anything like it before?"

That was the mood in which he left the house. He returned home late that evening tired but furious. His barrel of butter, except for a few nibbles with the spoon on top, returned with him practically untouched.

He would not eat his supper.

"The swine," he fumed, "the swine wanted my butter for the same price that they pay for the wretched dung they call butter, stuff fit for manure. The swine couldn't see any difference. Of course they couldn't since they are swine. They thought my price was another third as high as they paid for their swine dripping. Well, they

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shan't have my butter now if they offer me twice as much as I asked for it."

Gombarova was right then. Her husband's fortune was a mirage. But she said nothing. She loved him for what he was. And Vanya might be a doctor even yet.

That barrel of butter, which the Gombarov household had hitherto refrained from touching, was now attacked with great avidity. But Gombarov lost all interest in his dairy products.

But Gombarov was not one of those men who are content to sit still or grieve over a disappointed love. He had too much energy for that and this energy sought a response in some new project. His visits to town suddenly grew more frequent and upon each successive visit he brought a little parcel home and went immediately to his workroom with it. Gombarova regarded these visits with fear in her heart, but dared not ask what the parcels contained. He kept his room locked, but once when he left it to get something she made use of his brief absence to take a rapid glance into the secret room; she found it full of glass bulbs and glass tubes, chemical appliances and chemicals. She hurried out trembling.

"Sonya!" he called to her a few moments later.

"What is it?" she asked, going to him.

"You've been in my room," said Gombarov.

How did he know? He grew more and more like a wizard to her.

With this turn in affairs the Gombarov household became more and more like a ship without a captain or rudder or goal. Gombarov was wrapped up too much in his mysteries, Sofya Konstantinovna was with child and with many cares, the children were let very much alone. The Gombarov house was drifting. Yet moments of realisation came to Gombarvo and his wife of their responsibilities, but these moments were not always harmonious.

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Sofya Konstantinovna was scolding Vanya. Gombarov suddenly pulled a notebook out of his pocket and wrote something in it. There was something in Gombarov's manner which made her ask:

"What are you writing?"

"I am noting down all that you are saying," replied Gombarov, "to remind you of it when the proper time comes."

That kind of man was Gombarov. And she went on loving him in spite of everything. He was a wonderful boy to her, and a moment after the encounter she was watching him climb up the plum tree as agilely as a monkey and shaking down the fruit with the vigour of a young giant. All the Gombarov children were under the tree picking up the plums and putting them into Rivka's basket.

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CHAPTER VII

"A FRAIL, LONE SAPLING ON A CREST OF A HILL"

A SENSITIVE child is like a frail young tree, a sorrowful plant if not hedged in and protected by its sturdy elders. Such a tree partly hidden and shaded by others gets neither too much sun nor too much wind, neither dries up nor breaks; it grows up tall and slender and beautiful, so that when it reaches its prime it is found fit to bear the burden of its modern existence—as a telegraph pole.

But Vanya was like a frail, lone sapling which stood on a crest of a hill and bore all the brunt of the over-hot sun and the full force of the frantic winds and blindly drew all its nourishment from its own sap out of the darkness, its roots feeling their way deeper and deeper into the ground, clutching as it were for a hold there with its long grasping fingers, for very life. But outwardly it suffered from the outer glare and from the outer darkness of dark days and from the lack of a friendly branch that it might touch with one of its own branches and from the lack of a friendly rustle which it might return with a friendly rustle of its own, and from the lack of concert of tree voices rising in tumultuous prayer with a mystic majesty to some young beautiful wood god, slender in form—a crown of leaves on his head; only to fall and prostrate themselves before his father, a kindly old man with a long beard and gnarled hands.

Was it not because of this sense of aloneness experienced in his childhood that Vanya in his later years could not look without a strange and deep emotion, with a

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sense almost of affinity, upon a lone tree upon a crest of a hill, or upon three almost lone trees against a dramatic sky in Rembrandt's etching, or with a still deeper feeling of sympathy that he looked even later upon those grotesque trees in the West of England, where the sea-wind, hurling itself with fury against the sloping land, caused the trees to bend forward from the roots which held them fast and to look like frantic people running up hill as from some fabulous monster?

Vanya was left very much alone. His stepfather, who had not paid much attention even before, was too much absorbed in his laboratory, his mother was about to have another child and was worried with increasing household cares, Afanasya was busy with the younger children, Rivka was becoming more and more eccentric and bolted for Kieff even oftener than before; it is true that Vanya sometimes played with Raya and Dunya but he fought with them oftener. And he still went on with his German lessons and Russian reading exercises. Krilov's fables delighted him and even more an occasional new book of fairy tales. But he was left to himself all the rest of the time and he developed the habit of brooding—whether in the woods, in the meadows, or in his room. No one ever told him anything, either the names of the trees or of the flowers, and other things remained nameless to him. His greatest delight was when his mother sometimes came to him at bed-time and told him a fairy tale or sang a folksong, or that well-known lullaby by Lermontov:

Sleep my baby, sleep my darling,
Bayoushki bayou,
Quietly the moon comes peeping,
And looks down on you.

I will tell you a fairy story,
Sing a song to you,

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Close your eyes, my own glory,
Bayoushki bayou.

* * * *

A bold knight upon your steed,
A dauntless Cossack soul,
You'll gallop off with my godspeed,
Looking toward your goal.
O the bitter tears in secret
I shall weep for you,
Sleep my angel, sleep my pet,
Bayoushki bayou.

But of all his mother's songs he loved best of all the song set to Pushkin's "Demons":

The storm rages, a Fury released,
The snow drifts are whirling wild,
Now she howls like a beast,
Then she moans like a child.

There were indeed the long winter nights when he lay sleepless and the snow drifts hurled themselves against the window and he thought he heard the wolves howl in the woods. And as he was a lonely boy it was natural that the wind and the trees and the sodden sky should speak to him, and he heard their voices with love and fear in his heart, and their moods became his moods.

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CHAPTER VIII

VANYA WANTS A CUP OF TEA, AND IS ACCUSED OF WANTING THE MOON

VANYA'S eyes, opening drowsily on a bleak autumn morning, sought the window, but the rest of him lay so altogether still that he might have been a mechanical doll, the mechanism of which, in need of winding up, was lapsing into complete inaction. And now these eyes looked fixedly out of the window as if the mechanism had really stopped.

Outside, Autumn, in her tawny, faded-red garments, with silver strands in her distraught hair, was sweeping up the ground as with a great besom and sent the leaves flying with every cold gust. The wind rose, the wind fell, then rose again, rustling followed on silence and passed into silence, now the sweeper rested on her besom, now she renewed her task with fresh vigour, causing the yellow leaves to rise in an agitated flurry, to eddy round and round in little aerial whirlpools, and in the end to swirl away with the current to settle in little heaps somewhere.

Perhaps in Vanya's heart.

There was the same rising and falling there, the same eddying flutter as of dead leaves—too dead for so young a heart sprouting with young grass, the same agitated swirl, followed by the same settled silence as under bleak skies, broken only by the cries of the crows winging black against grey.

And this great outside world, like a huge bird, perched

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in his heart, was like a great weight which prevented him from rising. He wanted to rise and he could not. He wanted to cry out for his mother and found no voice. Someone opened the door quietly and looked in, then walked away. Vanya, lying under his blankets, did not even look up to see who it was. Again the door opened quietly and someone looked in, and again Vanya made no stir to show that he was awake.

The thought of breakfast suddenly came to him, and with this thought he grew more animated. Hunger crept in upon him like a slow serpent, and thirst attacked him more boldly, like a ravenous wolf. He wanted his morning tea most of all. He heard footsteps in the corridor, but these, passing his door, went on and died away. Again he heard footsteps, passing his door, but these too went on and died away. Other footsteps passed his door, stirring each time hope in his heart, but none of them paused, and his hope fell. And between the footsteps of one person and another, thoughts came to him, maddening thoughts:

What was the object of life? What was before the world began? Of course, time was always and always would go on whatever happened, but space? Where did the world begin and where did it end, but how could it end, surely there was something beyond that, but where did it stop, how could it stop? Then there were figures—where did numbers end?—but how could they end when they did not even begin, properly speaking—did not Gombarov tell him that even one could be divided indefinitely and infinitesimally? He knew what a million was, he even knew that a trillion was a million million million and that a decillion was the figure one with sixty ciphers—but what came after that and after that, what name was there for a number consisting of one and a thousand ciphers? His mind grew dizzy, battalions and battalions of figures hurled themselves helplessly against a wall in

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his brain, and the futile combat made his head dizzy. He tried not to think, but all these problems importuned him against his will, and only the recurring footsteps in the corridor brought the recurring vision, each time more vivid, of a cup of tea; how fine it would be if a plate of steaming *blintsi*—pancakes—came with it, covered with butter and cream! But it was a cup of tea which tempted him most. Sometimes his mother brought him a cup. Footsteps were audible from time to time in the corridor; they were maddening, for they always passed on. At last the door opened quietly, Rivka looked in.

"Vanya, it's time to get up."

"Rivka, won't you get me a cup of tea, then I'll get up."

"I have other things to think of this morning, you lazy-bones."

Rivka, always kindly, had never spoken to him like that before. She walked out. Vanya shouted after her:

"I want a cup of tea, d'you hear?"

"What does Vanya want?" he heard his mother ask in the corridor.

"He wants the moon," he heard Rivka reply.

This incensed Vanya. They always said he wanted the moon when he wanted nothing more than a cup of tea.

"I want a cup of tea," he shouted.

His mother entered. Her manner was solemn.

"I want a cup of tea so much and Rivka won't give it to me."

"Let me help you to get dressed," was all his mother said, and he let her help him on with the things.

Once he was dressed, she took him by the hand, and still looking very solemn led him not as he supposed she would to the dining room but to the children's room, to Ilya's cradle.

"Look," she said to Vanya.

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Vanya looked perplexed. He had never seen Ilya look like that before. He lay erect in his cradle, his head propped up slightly on his pillow, his eyes closed, his small arms crossed on his breast, but what astonished Vanya was the waxen pallor of his brother's face—it looked exactly the colour of the candles they used in the house.

"Mamma, what is the matter with Ilyushka?" asked Vanya.

"Ilyushka is dead," said his mother repressing her tears.

At the word "dead" Vanya looked with curiosity at the small corpse, it was not so much death that interested him as the transformation brought about by death. The waxy, doll-like quality of Ilya's plump face, which had been only a day or two ago pink and soft and all spreading and quivering, held him fascinated, but fear and pathos had no part in this fascination; this was evident from the remark which he presently addressed to his mother:

"Mamma, when will the tea be ready?"

Vanya's mother did not appear to hear his question. She went to her own room. No one paid any attention to Vanya.

"I want my tea!" Vanya shouted at the top of his voice.

And though he went on crying his cry through the house, no one seemed to hear him, for they were all thinking of the dead.

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CHAPTER IX

ANOTHER GOMBAROV OPENS HIS EYES ON THE WORLD, AND IS NAMED ABSALOM

WITH the approach of winter the god of events did not spare the Gombarov household.

First of all, he brought a new child to Gombarova—a boy—and this child seemed so beautiful and showed such lustihood from the very moment that its eyes opened to the light that Gombarov was delighted to the extent of ignoring his laboratory for a whole week, and during all that time he puzzled his head as to what he should name his son. His first impulse was to call him Solomon, for he reasoned to himself that so handsome and so strong a child must also prove to be no less wise. But upon reflection it occurred to him that there were many Solomons in the world, and that of the several he had known in his time not a few were ugly, narrow-chested, and that one or two, grown to manhood, were even quite wifeless. And it occurred to him upon further reflection that what he sought was a name which before everything had a certain uniqueness, a uniqueness, however, not without distinction. Gambarov knew the whole Hebrew Bible including those birth registry sections with all their "begats," almost by heart, but Absalom was the name which kept on recurring most in his mind with a persistence that boded the inevitable. Absalom was his choice.

"There is one thing about Absalom," argued Gombarov with his wife, "there is probably not another Absalom in the world."

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"That's just why I don't like it," replied Gombarova, "and besides, it will be an awful nuisance not to be able to call him anything for short. You can't always call him Absolomchik, which is rather awkward for a pet name."

But Gombarov was obdurate, and his wife, weak and worn out in her confinement bed, her new darling at her breast, had not the strength to continue the argument, and was moreover so pleased with her husband's renewed interest in matters more intimate than those connected with his laboratory that in a sense she gave in willingly. And Absalom became the child's name. As if realising the full portent of the decision, Absalom in a few days grew a black shock of hair amazing for one so young.

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CHAPTER X

ANOTHER PORTRAIT—VANYA LEARNS THAT THERE ARE MYSTERIES IN LIFE

THE god of events sent a governess into the Gombarov household about the same time. Her advent into the house meant more to Vanya than to any of the other children, why he himself hardly knew at the time. It was his first acquaintance with the subtle, the mysterious and the indefinable, with that essence in life which is more of the nature of a sweet frail perfume than a physical substance, and which attracted like a quiet unflaunting flower.

Nadezhda Vassilyevna Lavrova was a fair-haired girl of twenty-two, medium in stature and slender, with an attractively pale face, which, clear and luminous, radiated its light like a pale chaste dawn. And that was the chief characteristic of her facial architecture: it was chaste and linear—like a Holbein drawing. The oval outline seemed to have been drawn with one firm, masterly stroke, the eye-brows were two thin, infinitely delicate arches, separated and as it were supported by a no less delicately shaped column in the centre; when the eye-lids drooped, as they did at moments, softly, over their grey-blue treasure, the eye-lashes formed answering downward arches, edged with a minute fringe, fashioned with loving care; the line of the mouth was straight, but the upper and the lower curves of the lips diverged gradually and sufficiently near the centre to give the suggestion of a slight pout and a reticent hint of sensuality. Her long

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slender hands with their slender characterful fingers might have been carved out by some Renaissance sculptor like Duccio, someone who surely not only knew his anatomy but was also a master of the decorative line. Altogether she was a compact drawing, which revealed no evasion of difficulties.

But in those days she was to Vanya not so much a fine drawing—that memory made her for him—but an exquisite mystery. He loved being near her, he loved to do things for her, a worshipful feeling awoke in him for the first time and he hovered about her with a full, sometimes bursting heart. But he remained as always reserved, and he did not tell her anything as he had sometimes meant to do; in coming to her he lost that desire, for her mere presence already took his burdens from him. Even his German lessons, which he now took from her and no longer from Boris Lvovitch, became easier for him.

Nadezhda Vassilyevna, on her part, was very kind to Vanya, as she was to everyone; indeed her excessive, world-embracing kindness and its child-likeness often amused the Gombarovs, especially step-father Gombarov, who on two or three occasions laughed outright at her naïve solicitude for animals and peasants. And her solicitude was really absurd. Once she suddenly looked out of the window on a cold winter morning and saw the hatless Kharton carrying large logs which he intended splitting for firewood. And she called to him:

"Kharton!"

Kharton dropped his log in the snow on the very spot where he had paused, and entered the house. He stood before Nadezhda Vassilyevna, his young rather lined face mellow with good nature, his long matted sandy hair falling in sickle-shaped tufts over his low forehead, while thin spreading streams of perspiration trickled down from it like rivulets from an overgrown forest during a

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thaw. His cap stuck out from under the belt of his blouse. He stood at a kind of lazy attention, his large horny hands hung languidly at his sides.

"Kharton, you'll catch cold not wearing your cap."

The mere thought of the cold made her shiver.

Kharton's smile broadened at Nadezhda Vassilyevna's words and its beam grew warmer, like that of an afternoon sun. The young woman's solicitude, the warmth of the room, and his shyness, caused the perspiration to run down his face in profuse streams.

"*Barishnya,*" he said at last, "it's nothing to us common folk, I'm used to it. And in my soldier days—and that's not so long ago—my comrades used to roll me in the snow naked, just for a lark, *barishnya,* right stark naked, without a stitch on! And I could do it now if I liked."

"Don't!" cried Nadezhda Vassilyevna, distressed, as if she feared he would put his threat into practice. "But come, warm yourself near the stove," she urged him, "and then put your cap on when you go out. But no, wait, don't go until I tell you." And she ran out of the room.

The good Kharton did as he was told. Kharton was not a fool, though he was very much a child,—after all, one must humour the gentlefolk—ah, he had met them before, those gentlefolk with small white hands who "went among the people." One of them, a frail gentle thing with a waist so thin that he thought it was "a wonder that a *veterok* (a little wind) didn't come along and snap her in two," once lived at the house of a wealthy proprietor he had worked for and she used to come and attend to his wife's baby sometimes, fetching it all sorts of baby's foods and medicines; the little one, which had never tasted anything before but its mother's milk, died, the Lord had willed it so, and may the Lord have mercy on its soul—it was not the young lady's fault. The

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same little lady used to tell him that there was no difference between his wife and her, and that all were equal before the Lord; and one day, in a busy season, she went a'haying like common folk, and she hayed and hayed, for hours, and didn't say that she was tired or complain once. . . .

While he was still thinking over the vagaries of the gentlefolk, Nadezhda Vassilyevna returned, bearing a tray which contained a glass of tea and some jam tarts. Kharton bowed his thanks, and pouring his tea into a saucer, held the saucer up on the five extended fingers of his hand and sipped audibly. Having disposed of his tea and a jam tart, Kharton, bowing, mumbled his thanks, put his cap on and walked out. He was perspiring fiercely.

Next day Nadezhda herself visited him and brought him some quinine. Kharton, who could roll in the snow stark naked, had caught his first cold. Gombarov teased Nadezhda about it.

Nadezhda took upon herself the protection of Vanya —"her little Turk" she called him. That was because when she first came to the house he wore a red fez with a black tassel. With his brown skin, slightly aquiline nose and black hair, Vanya indeed might have been a little Turk, and especially when he stood beside the pale-faced, fair-haired Nadezhda, in her white clothes that she loved to wear. Vanya's fez was an expensive one, and when one day he returned from a stroll without it, having lost it or had it stolen, he received a very severe scolding from his mother, but Nadezhda took him to her heart afterward and consoled him:

"Never mind the fez, Vanya, you will still remain my little Turk, my own little Turk."

She tried to protect Vanya in other ways. There was especially one exciting winter afternoon in the Gombarov house. Vanya had just returned home, eager to

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tell Nadezhda about the wonderful snow-man he had made. He found the house in a state of agitation. Kharton and another muzhik were going out with ropes. A cow was lowing agonisingly outside. Vanya ran towards the window to see what the matter was. Nadezhda barred his way.

"You mustn't look, Vanya."

The cow's cries did not cease. There were agitated voices outside.

"Now together," said someone.

"It's coming," said someone else.

"Another good pull will do it," said another voice, which Vanya recognised as Kharton's.

Then someone swung the door wide open, and Kharton came in, bearing in his arms something large wrapped up in a blanket. He put it outside the stove and half uncovered it. It was a quivering red calf. Nadezhda was bending over it in an attitude of tenderness.

There was but one thing that puzzled Vanya for some time. That was Nadezhda's occasional severity toward him. There were moments when she seemed more austere than she had cause to be. He had done something, it was true, but that was no reason why she should put him across her knees, face downward, and chastise him with her hand on his naked skin. He fought and struggled with her and was astonished to find how strong she was. And one day, after his chastisement, as he was rearranging his clothes, he asked her:

"Why do you whip me, Nadezhda Vassilyevna?"

"Because you have been a wicked boy," she replied in a tone which made him look up at her.

Child though he was, he saw shame rise in her eyes, and he felt quite as suddenly a wave of shame surge up to his own, and this shame was both sweet and painful. Something like a faint light was struggling to break

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through the clouds in his brain. He realised but one thing: Nadezhda Vassilyevna liked to chastise him, and with this came the more astonishing realisation that he enjoyed chastisement at her hands.

As if she had grasped what was struggling in the boy's brain, Nadezhda Vassilyevna burst into tears, and Vanya going up to her full of pity and solicitude, she pressed him to her bosom, and went on crying out between her sobs:

"Forgive me, my little Turk!"

Vanya was ready to do anything for her.

A few days later Nadezhda left the house, and a few days after her departure two police officials, with dangling sabres, called at the Gombarov house to make inquiries about her. She was implicated in a plot on the Governor's life, and they wanted to discover her whereabouts. They questioned everyone in the house rather severely and searched her room but found nothing.

Nadezhda's departure left Vanya in a secret despair, for there was no one in whom he could confide. His mother's many growing cares bore her as upon a strong current further and further away from him. He carried his misery into the woods with him; here the trees crackled with frost, and the dry snow crunched under his feet, and his heart was full of sad echoes. The sense of the irrevocable bore in upon him, and for the first time the thought was born in him, "I wish I were dead."

But Nadezhda remained with him in some strange way. As Rivka was to become for him a physical symbol of the tragic in life, so Nadezhda's white face, the more as it receded into the distance, was to become for him a mask of life's mystery, a tranquil if sad mask, with a thousand emotions surging underneath and giving it

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shape; being as it were, the quintessence of an idea, a clearly delineated abstraction drawn by a Humanist painter and endowed with distinguished sensuousness and flower-like frailty, yet suggesting a strength not to be measured in terms of our worldliness.

But all this was much later.

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CHAPTER XI

A VILLAIN MAKES HIS APPEARANCE ON THE SCENE

THE village tavern keeper Mendel had been closeted with Gombarov in the laboratory and was taking his leave.

Professor Malinov, who had called in at that moment and cut short the consultation, stood by the window in silence and with a look of amused irony watched, walking down the pathway toward the gate, the tall, gaunt, somewhat hunched figure of Mendel, angular and all points, with pointed beard and pointed coat-tails, its long legs making long strides and cutting long angles like a huge compass; it looked altogether like a burlesque on Mephistopheles, and as it made its way rapidly down the path and disappeared among the trees the last thing visible was its long flapping coat-tails.

But even more ironical was the smile of Gombarov as he watched Malinov watching Mendel.

"You don't approve of my friend, I see," said Gombarov, as Malinov at last turned his face.

"Candidly, I don't. When I see you two together it's like seeing white and black—the most honest man alive and the greatest blackguard."

"And yet we are both Jews."

"All I can say is that if all Jews were like you . . ." began Malinov.

But Gombarov interrupted him with unconcealed irony in his voice:

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"It's a strange thing, but almost every Gentile I know has a Jew or two he likes."

"Still, I must urge you to be careful. You are thinking of leasing a house from this man, who has the reputation of being a thief and an incendiary. He'll not only rob you but burn the house down to get the insurance. As you know, he has been to America, where he has learnt that beastly phrase of his 'All right,' which I have observed he uses always in place of our own 'Nitzchevo.' But why has he come back, if not to escape justice? I don't trust that man."

"Yes, I suppose they were too clever for him over there. He probably worked on too small a scale, and as you may know, it's always the small thief that's caught. But I suspect my wife has been talking to you. Don't think I don't know my man. Only yesterday I called at his place and found him, with a grin on his face, having rifled a little while before the pocket of a muzhik he had made drunk. I was rather amused: the three of them, that is Mendel himself, his son and Mendel's very old father, were sitting around the table, discussing the affair. Mendel was saying: 'I did the job well, didn't I?' *'All right!'* said the son. The old man, dressed in his long black capote, smiled contemptuously: 'You are still in your swaddling,' said he, turning to Mendel, 'your mother's milk hasn't dried yet on your lips. Now look at me—as true as I am a Jew, with beard and locks, all by myself I have stolen seven horses in one night, when I was your age. Well, that's something to boast of. Now aren't you ashamed of your kindergarten tales? And are you, or are you not, the son of your father?' "

"Detestable!" exclaimed Malinov.

"Perhaps you have changed your mind about my honesty, but as scientists we must regard all matters without prejudice. If I permitted myself a prejudice I

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should be even more prejudiced against the stupidity of the muzhik in permitting himself repeatedly to be done by the same Jew and by the same trick. You yourself said the other day that stupidity is a crime, in which I agreed with you."

"Yes, but there is such a thing as tipping the scales the other way. I was struck by statistics I happened to chance upon, which showed Jewish forgers in Russia preponderantly out of proportion to their population," said Malinov.

Gombarov looked at Malinov's grave face and burst into a laugh, boyishly gleeful and innocent. He began by making a jest:

"As we all know, figures do not lie. They show perhaps in this case that the Jew's aversion to the cross is sufficiently great to induce him to learn how to write his own name."

Then seriously:

"But really, figures do lie in spirit even when they are true to the letter. You don't permit a man to own or till land and expect him to produce fruit and vegetables; you are very much astonished when he only produces a crop of forgeries; but even in this you do all you can to prevent him, for you permit only a certain per cent to go to schools—I dare say the forgers are not of this lucky number, which usually consists of doctors and professionals of all sorts. In short, you deny the Jews straw to make bricks with, and are surprised and indignant that the bricks he has made by the sheer wizardry of his brain pave the way to hell! When I look upon Mendel, I neither sympathise with him nor do I condemn him. I regard him as I would regard a chemical product, forced into its present shape by outer forces, not, however, without coming in conflict with resisting forces from within, and this clash and all its torture resulting in a thing which it is true oftener resembles one

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of your medieval Christian gargoyles than a human being."

"Admitting that there is some truth in what you say," interposed Malinov, "remember you are proposing to take a house from Mendel, and Mendel's reputation is too unsavoury for you to risk the venture. I am speaking as a friend."

"I am different from other men, and I get along with all sorts of people," replied Gombarov. "Now Mendel happens to have the only vacant house in the neighbourhood with a room large enough to contain the new machinery I have ordered. Depend upon me: I can handle my man if no one else can."

In spite of the protestations of his wife, his friend Malinov, and his neighbours, all dubious about the project, Gombarov was obdurate, as always. He took over Mendel's big house in the village, and in spite of its being midwinter moved all the household effects and machinery on sledges. Little Katya caught a light case of pneumonia, the first day in the new house, which had not yet thawed out, but fortunately prompt aid pulled her through quickly. Things were not settled for some time in the house.

New machinery went on arriving almost every day. Gombarov became more and more absorbed in his new project. No one in the house appeared to know what the project was, though it was evident that it had to do with metallurgy, for among the things to arrive were crucibles, and moulds and drills of all sizes and shapes, and bars of metal. The larger pieces of machinery were fixed securely with screws to slightly raised platforms on the floor, while numberless pivotal wheels were arranged along the ceiling and connected by long leather belting with the wheels on the mechanisms below.

Sometimes Gombarov was too absorbed in arranging his place to appear at meals. He and his workman could

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be heard hammering nearly all day; there were short intervals of silence and an occasional whir of wheels. Gombarova had a preoccupied look at luncheon, when Gombarov did not appear and the hammering went on. Once or twice she attempted to remind him by knocking on his door.

"I am coming!" he would shout without opening the door.

When he finally came the next meal was on the table. He gobbled his food quickly without waiting for dessert and left at once for his room, in spite of his wife's entreaties. He grew more and more indifferent to household matters, more and more abstracted in his ways, and as absent-minded as that *Fliegende Blaetter* professor who, protected by his umbrella, went out in a downpour of rain to water the flowers. The peasants regarded him with awe as if he were a kind of magician; the well-to-do middle classes regarded him simply as a fool with a bee in his bonnet who was "chucking his money away;" those in his own house beginning with Gombarova looked upon him with that sense of inarticulate fear, which came of the instinctive realisation that their fate was solely in the hands of this man, that their future was at his disposal, and that this future was altogether enigmatical.

Weeks and weeks passed. As the hammering in Gombarov's workshop ceased, the whir of wheels grew more frequent, occasionally accompanied by the stentorian buzz of the drill. Sometimes one caught a glimpse of the interior through the door being left open, a bellows operated by machine power could be seen fanning the fires in the oven, in which hung a number of crucibles supported on a long rod. Now and then Gombarov, perspiring profusely, his sleeves rolled up, could be seen bending over, throwing a new ingot into a crucible, almost transparently white from the heat. Then again

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he was seen to take down one of the crucibles with a long pincer-like weapon and to pour the contents into a wedge-like iron mould prepared for the purpose. To Gombarova, passing the door, it seemed as if he were pouring out and forming their own souls. "This ingot has a blemish," Gombarov was at one moment saying to his workman. Gombarova fled with fear in her heart.

It was Vanya's great joy to be sent into the workshop with a message, as he was sometimes permitted to linger and to watch the molten metal being poured out and afterwards the newly-hardened alloy being filed to smoothness. Sometimes the whole process was performed out-of-doors; at such times special earthen moulds were prepared in a long box filled with black soil.

No one appeared to know the object of Gombarov's experiments. Gombarova had long since ceased to oppose him or to question him, but there were keen moments when her great love of him swallowed up all her fears. And as the small capital left by her first husband dwindled, the hope in her heart grew rather than diminished that Vanya would yet be a doctor.

The long weeks stretched into months. There had become two worlds in the Gombarovs' house. Gombarov's workshop was one world, the Gombarov household was another. And this last world was like a satellite of the first; it clung to it by an attraction over which it had no control, with all its chaos it held together like a mass of nebulæ by some central force quite outside itself, and gravitated along with it in a circle of helpless subjection.

On one side of the big double door, the wheels went on whirring, the hammers beating, the drills buzzing their stentorian monotonous song—all the discords uniting to form a symphony of energy; on the other side was a constant scurrying of many feet, a constant wrangling of re-

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fractory young voices, the scolding by the elders, now by Gombarova, now by the servants, now old Afanasya's pleading voice, now Rivka's nervous threat of withholding the nice warm tarts she had just baked, now Marta's robust commanding voice demanding obedience. In spite of this formidable concert of commands, scoldings, threats and entreaties Vanya went on bawling, and the other children went on mimicking him. At last, in desperation, they seized Vanya by the shoulders, and in spite of all his struggles they succeeded in pushing him through the open door into the cold. Outside was a biting frost; Vanya felt it nipping his ears and the tip of his nose. He began to hammer at the door with his small fists, and to shout names at his tormentors. This not only annoyed them, but kept him warm. Large burning tears of resentment and self-pity trickled slowly in his heart. Gombarov sometimes heard Vanya's knocks and cries, and marvelled at the boy's persistence.

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CHAPTER XII

MARTA'S STRANGE LOVER—VANYA'S DREAM

ONE day Spring appeared, with as yet a shy smile. And Winter, his heart softened, relaxed his hard, white bearded face, down which ran large, warm spreading tears, and his eyes grown younger laughed through them at the sight of the soothing sun.

Vanya liked the thaw. The dear rivulets revealed the fresh grass, as yet tender as a babe's skin. Here and there skeleton bushes and young trees and clusters of leafless thorns emerged from the deep snow like symbols of a coming resurrection. Mountains of snow rolled away as it were and released the earth from her entombment. The fringe of long icicles, edging the eaves of houses like a lace, diminished perceptibly, and its patterns grew softer, less austere. Holes opened up in the hard, inert stream like eyes waking from a long sleep, and the clear water blinked out of them with animation. Miniature waterfalls formed themselves in the thinner streams in the meadows and, following the course of these streams, Vanya saw them wind between banks of snow and disappear under the snow like endless thin serpents entering their lairs. The little sledge bells jingled along the roads, and in their jingle there was the joy and sadness of last snows. A delicious smell came from the earth, in those spots where the white robe slipped from her. The young man in the *troika* put his lips blissfully for a moment on the hair of the young girl at his side—where it showed under the little fur cap, and breathed deeply at the same time. While the great

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sun, smiling, put out his long radiant fingers and undid the perspiring driver's sheepskin.

But in the evening, when the Sun closed his eyes and drew the dark bed-cover over his radiant limbs, there was a change.

The Wind, with a great flowing beard like a besom, leant his giant arms on a black cloud and blew from the north. The *troika* driver, going out in the evening for a drink of "something hot," put up his large fur collar and pulled down the ear-flaps over his ears. Winter, sulking, as if he repented, hardened his face again, his tears froze into icicles, and the stream, like a deep furrow on his forehead, crackled as he knitted his brow.

Vanya felt wretched. He went to his room, and in his lonely misery he tore his hair. Later, finding it cold in bed, went to the kitchen and climbed up on the oven. Here lay Marta, who was glad of company. She pressed Vanya to her hot body and whispered:

"I am glad you have come, *golubchik;* * a *domovoi* ** a little while ago had his knee on my chest and his hand on my throat, trying to strangle me."

Vanya shivered.

"Don't be afraid, *golubchik,* he never comes when there are two."

"Why don't you marry, then, and then he won't come?"

"Ah, you don't understand, *golubchik,*"—and Marta went on to explain: "You see it's this way: it was on the last Kuzma and Demian night, and I lit a candle and sat before a mirror, watching in it for my chosen one to appear. In a little while I thought I heard a low knock on my window, then the door opened and closed, someone seemed to slip in though I didn't see anyone, then there was a slight stir of air as if someone was coming

* Darling; literally, little pigeon.
** House demon.

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closer,—'my loved one, my *golubchik* has come,' I was thinking, and I looked all excited into the glass. . . ." At this point Marta gave a little sob and could not go on for a moment.

"What's the matter, Marta, what happened?" asked Vanya, all agitated and afraid, but fascinated in some unaccountable way and wanting to know more.

And as soon as Marta could speak, she said:

". . . I saw him . . . in the glass . . . looking over my shoulder . . ."

"Him?" asked Vanya. "You mean . . . " and stopped short.

"Yes, the *byess.** He was grinning at me, as large as life . . . then I fell into a faint . . . when I came to there was nothing. But ever since then, he's come to me some night . . . and he puts his knee on my chest and his hands on my throat and tries to choke me. The Lord have mercy on me, a miserable sinner."

There was a pause, and in that pause the windows rattled with the wind, and an unfastened shutter struck the wall somewhere with a bang.

"Oh Lord, have mercy . . ." moaned Marta.

Vanya plucked up courage to speak:

"I say, Marta, do you believe in *him*—the *byess?* Papa says there is no *byess*—and no *vyedma.*" **

"Lord bless you, child, and I saw one myself the other evening as I was walking alone along a dark lane—she was flying round up in the air on a broom-stick, and she looked at me and showed her teeth . . . and so I quickly crossed myself, and she disappeared all of a sudden. You see they are afraid of the cross, that's why they never come nigh a church spire. And now, Vanya, go to sleep, darling,"—and she laid Vanya's head gently on her high firm bosom, there where the *byess* had had his

* Byes=demon.
** Vyedma=witch.

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knee, and had a feeling that Vanya's head would protect her that night, not only because "her chosen one" came to her only when she was alone, but also because it seemed to her that *biessi* in general had a partiality for Christians; she had worked in many Jewish families and she had yet to meet a Jew who feared the devil. And she wondered how such good-hearted people as the Gombarovs did not believe in Christ, and that meant that they did not fear God either. What a strange people —not to fear either God or devil.

Marta was right. The *byess* did not come to her again that night.

But if he did not come to her, he came to Vanya, if not the *byess* himself, then at least the *byess's* second cousin.

Vanya dreamt that he was in his own bed, and that a tall thin-legged man with a rooster's head came to him and sat down on the chair by the bed. He smiled at Vanya out of his bright green eyes under his big red comb, then rose and beckoned to Vanya to follow him. Vanya felt horribly afraid but felt drawn on by a strange, irresistible fascination. He rose and followed his guide. He walked through corridor after corridor, in the dark; he knew that his guide was ahead of him, though he could not hear his footsteps, only a dim glimmer of light coming from he knew not where played upon his guide's red cock's comb; they turned corner after corner, there seemed to be no end. But at last they came to a passage where the corridor appeared to stop. The guide pulled two curtains aside here, and revealed a little alcove and a little door at the end of it, lit up mysteriously as by a dim image lamp. Vanya thought he heard voices, which as he approached the door seemed in some curious way to change into a kind of cackle as of hens. Then a terrible fear came upon Vanya, and just as his guide was about to take him by

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the hand and pull him through the door he gave a violent scream and woke up, sobbing. Marta's face was over him, and she was drawing his face to her bosom. Marta was saying tenderly:

"What's the matter, darling? Don't cry, darling."

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CHAPTER XIII

VANYA'S FURTHER ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE DEVIL

MANY weeks passed without any important happening. Gombarov went on with his experiments, Gombarova was more than ever preoccupied with household cares and with desperate thoughts of the future, the children continued their wrangling. Vanya, for some reason, felt dull and sluggish, his mind was full of vague, contending thoughts, and in his unhappiness a kind of fever consumed him within—like a fire which struggles through many passages of an edifice to find its way out and finds no egress. And he himself lived and walked in a kind of restless fog, which had no end. As before, no one paid any attention to him, and there was no one to tell him anything. And shut off in this way from communion with others life became for him a real problem, and young as he was there were moments when he already looked upon the world as upon a phantom world peopled by phantoms and there were the more rare moments when neither the world nor he appeared to exist at all and everything was a dream. But these moments were a happiness to him, an escape from reality, which was like the slow groaning monotony of a Russian folk song.

He also found relief in Andersen's fairy tales, Krilov's fables and in Rivka's jam tarts. A new book was a real event, and at this time Robinson Crusoe's world was more real to him than the world he lived in.

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A week came crowded with events.

On a day in early summer Vanya was passing the market place. A large crowd, mostly peasants, were gathered there in a circle. A woman's pitiful screams came from the centre—and between the screams the dull sound of lashing with a whip. Without knowing what was happening Vanya's heart was tortured with pity, and his first impulse was to run away from these agonising cries, which awakened fear in him and made him tremble as with ague. But that intense curiosity, which made him follow the coxcombed one through the corridors of his dream, now made him halt and turn his face abruptly toward his fears. Who was the poor woman who was crying? Why was she crying so piteously? How could men torment others so, and look on? Perhaps it was not that at all that made Vanya turn, but something else which he did not yet understand. For looking back upon this little episode years afterward, Vanya, no longer Vanya, but John Gombarov, knitting his eyebrows in his effort to recall, sometimes wondered as to whether he had not mixed things up and whether this was not a dream like the other dream. But whether it was a dream or not a dream John Gombarov remembered that he, Vanya, small and insignificant, made his way with a trembling and aching heart through the crowd, which was too interested in the spectacle to bother about a little boy nudging his elbows against their knees, and he came upon this scene: Marta was in the middle, her hands tied to a post. One *muzhik* was standing at her side and lifting up her skirt from behind, while another was plying the lash with all his might across her bare buttocks and legs. Later Vanya discovered that this punishment was meted out to her for stealing something from one of the *muzhiks* of the village. She had been discharged some weeks previously by Gombarov for stealing silverware. Vanya look pitifully at Marta

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squirming and at her exposed parts, streaked red and blue. He thought of the devil who troubled her and wondered whether it was that they were trying to beat out of her. He had heard such things were done.

That evening Vanya asked his mother:

"Were they trying to beat the devil out of Marta?"

Stepfather Gombarov overheard the question.

"No," he interposed with a laugh, "more likely it was the devil *in them* that made them beat her."

The devil became a terrible reality to Vanya. That night he cried out in his sleep, and his mother came to him and comforted him and put him in her bed.

Next day Vanya happened to pass the window of cobbler Ivanov's shop. Stepan Antonovitch Ivanov was sitting at the window working over a boot. Yankel's rival, observing a shadow in the street, looked up. Vanya suddenly and involuntarily stopped short, as he realised that it was Ivanov who yesterday had used the whip on Marta. So it was this man who had the devil in him! Ivanov's brusque voice broke in upon Vanya's reflection:

"Move on, you little Christ-killer!"

Vanya impulsively stuck his tongue out and was about to pass on, when something huge, heavy, as of iron, struck his mouth and fell to the ground. It was a military boot, with spurs and heavily nailed heels. Vanya put his hand to his mouth, the upper lip was swollen and bleeding, there seemed to be a big gash under the lip. Vanya, greatly alarmed and agitated, ran home. It was a hot day and the sweat and the tears ran down Vanya's face and mixed with the blood and made him look quite wretched. There was consternation in the Gombarov household at the sight of him. Gombarov examined him, but owing to the swelling it was hard to tell how deep the gash was. After Vanya had been attended to, Gombarov took him to the police sergeant of the dis-

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trict and lodged a complaint against Ivanov. The sergeant, who, owing to the heat, was in his shirt sleeves, put on his epauletted coat and his sabre in order to look official and sent for Ivanov. In a few minutes Ivanov appeared, carrying a pair of boots. He was questioned.

"It was your own boots," replied Ivanov, unwrapping the parcel, as if the fact of their being the sergeant's boots mitigated the offence.

The sergeant looked at the huge boots, and scratched the nape of his neck; they were indeed his own. He looked rather puzzled, as if this revelation of their being his boots put the guilt on his shoulders.

"*Nitschevo,** a fine pair of boots," drawled out the sergeant at last, "but next time you must throw anything, try a lady's pair, a fashionable lady's, if possible."

Gombarov took Vanya home to await the result of the injury. Luckily, the gash showed every prospect of healing.

If these two petty events had a place in Vanya's life they were nothing to what happened a week later, on the night that Gombarov left for town to apply to the authorities for a permit to start his works. That night was to change radically not only Vanya's life but that of the whole Gombarov household.

* Never mind!

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CHAPTER XIV

CONSPIRACY—CONFLAGRATION

STEPFATHER GOMBAROV left for town that evening in great exultation. At last, after many months of arduous labour, he was to start his works. What he was going to manufacture was a mystery in the village. But why should the village know if the Gombarov household was kept in the dark about it? It is likely that Gombarova knew, but if she did, doubtless, after her husband's earlier ventures she was afraid to speak of it, lest she arouse hopes doomed to fall, and fears too racking to be borne. And when she rocked the cradle at night and sang *"Bayoushki bayou"* it was not only to lull her youngest to sleep, but also to lull into forgetfulness the hopes and fears of her heart. The past was always passing like a cloud across clear skies—a kind of premonition calling upon her to suspect the future. And to dwell thus on the past is to invert time, to look upon the future as upon a tormenting memory. This mood communicated itself in a measure to the rest of the household.

In the village the mystery annoyed many people, mystery being a divine attribute and therefore unbecoming to a frail human. And the rumour grew among certain people of Gombarov being Antichrist.

As for Gombarov himself, he felt altogether unconcerned about himself, or the past, present or future. He now regarded his poultry experiment as child's play, and his rusty cream separator as but a cast-off toy.

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What he was doing now was quite different. Now he dealt with fire, crucibles and metals, a combination full of infinite and fascinating possibilities, and giving him an interest in life equal to that of a god and a creator.

And somewhere, in a deep subterranean chamber, the way to which led through a thousand dark corridors, sat two Beings—one large-limbed, with a huge beard, Jehovah-like, grave; the other tall and gaunt, with pointed beard, Satanic, with a stealthy leer. The two faced each other over a table in the Fate Chamber, and on the table were lying various charts with curious zig-zag marks, not unlike the thermometer charts on which doctors note the progress of their patients; these were charts of individual lives and they showed how near men approached heaven or hell. The Satanic one was leaning his right elbow on a tall pile of these charts. The Other was holding a chart in his left hand and saying:

"Now here is a man after my own heart. I mean Semyon Gombarov. He's a vessel full of joy and energy. He is altogether fearless, and nothing daunts him. He is good because he knows no good and no evil. He has the brain of a god and the soul of a child. He perspires over his work, and yet it is all play to him. He tires of one toy and gets another. But now he has found a toy which he will never tire of. I am thoroughly delighted with him."

"And you think you are sure of him," said the Satanic one. "You must bear in mind that you have been particularly good to him. You have given him everything: health, a wife who loves him, and money to indulge his whims. It is easy to be good when you have what you want. It is easy to throw away toys when you have grown tired of them. But now he has a toy that he loves, and of which he is not likely to tire. Take that away from him and see what will happen. See whether

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his spirits won't dampen, whether he will remain a child, whether all his fine energy won't turn from its play to curse you. It is true that at present the chart shows that he is zig-zagging his way to heaven, but we are by no means at the end of his chart. Give him into my charge for a short time and see whether he doesn't fall more quickly than he rose. Come, you know yourself that you don't want anyone who hasn't stood the full test."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Take his toy away from him."

"And how do you propose to do that?"

"Oh, I've arranged all that. It was my influence, as you may suspect, that has made him lease the house from Mendel, who is one of my most efficient emissaries with a fine record of arson on earth."

"Very well. But there is just one thing. Be careful about Vanya. I am very much interested in him."

"Don't you worry on that account. I am not interested in him—at least not just yet. As you know, it is never too late to spoil."

The night was starless and moonless. A great darkness and stillness settled upon the earth, and this darkness, like a hugh, brooding hen, spread out her wings and enfolded every house, every tree, every living thing. And in this darkness the gleaming green eyes of Lucifer, like those of a cat, watched one Mendel prowl cautiously round the Gombarov house past midnight. There was nowhere a sound or a glimmer of light.

Vanya woke with a start, and rubbed his eyes. There was a terrific pounding on the outer door, and loud shouting. Why was his room lit up so curiously? Why were there those strange dancing shadows on the walls and on the window draperies? What was that strange

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crackling behind the large double door, connecting Vanya's room with the workshop but barred and bolted on the other side? Vanya looked behind him toward the large double door. Little flames were shooting up from the chink under the door, like a brood of young serpents poking their heads for the first time out of their nest. The room was hot and oppressive. The pounding and the shouting continued. There was the sound of running footfalls in the street. Quite suddenly there was a stir in the house itself, there was a commotion in all the rooms as in a hive suddenly awakened to find an intruder within, the house was seething with agitation, the cries of the children rose sharply above the confusion of dim noises.

As Vanya jumped out of bed the small door swung wide open and his mother ran in and seized him by his hand.

"Hurry up, Vanya!" she cried desperately, dragging the half sleepy Vanya along through the corridor to a place where all the children but half dressed were huddled together in charge of Rivka. "Oh my God! Oh my God!"

Someone had by this time hammered down the outer door with an axe, and there were several hands ready to receive them outside. The faces of the peasants shone as yet dimly in the red haze which came and went in flickers; this haze came from the sparks which flew from the chimney; it rose and died down and rose again with growing volume; it was as if the whole house were gasping and breathing hard through its mouth. But beyond the radius of this red haze everything was black. This blackness, too, was alive, men could be heard running in it with clinking pails, and the din of voices grew and grew. But this blackness did not stay black long. Even as Gombarova was making her way with her children, counting them again and again to see that they were all

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there, the light pursued them, and lit up their way for them toward a friendly cottage.

"Oh my God, oh my God!" groaned Gombarova.

She no sooner saw her children secure in the cottage than she ran out again, to save what she could. By this time the flames tore themselves desperately from the windows, lingered for a moment outside as if undecided which way to turn and were then caught up by sudden gusts of wind, which came God only knew where from and swept the flames round the house with a wide flutter like that of a loose scarf round a woman's neck on a wintry day. The air as far as could be seen was filled with floating particles, a snow of another world, fantastic and unbelievable. Threads of green flame and blue flame intruded upon the red, and when these appeared there were strange noises and little explosions. These came from the chamber where Gombarov kept his chemicals and they confirmed the faithful wiseacres in their belief that Gombarov was Antichrist and a worker in black magic. If anything more were needed to assure them it was that terrible moment for everyone when, with a deafening noise, a black thing rose swiftly from the flames and cutting a curve through the red haze cut a deep gash in the earth at the feet of the police sergeant.

The sergeant trembled at his narrow escape and swore an oath; then, reconsidering, crossed himself. *"Nitschevo,"* he remarked, looking at his fine military boots with spurs, the same pair that Vanya was acquainted with, and then at the wedge-like piece of steel only a few inches away; he attempted to pull it up, but not all the exertion of his powerful frame could budge it. "A fine pair of boots," he went on mumbling to himself, but the thought at the back of his mind was that not even this fine pair of boots could have saved him if that evil thing had come a few inches nearer.

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When Gombarova arrived she found that a few of the more thoughtful neighbours had saved some of the bedding and other objects of utility and had piled them up at some distance from the house. But it was useless to think of saving more. The fire had spread very rapidly and caught the whole house as if it were no more than a shell.

The new village fire engine, drawn and worked by human hands, proved useless. It was its first trial, and it simply would not work. This provoked all sorts of comment.

"What can you expect when you have demons against you!" said one who believed Gombarov to be Antichrist.

"The little beast is costive," said a more practical person, who was examining the mechanism.

"Give her a drop of castor oil," suggested a third, who always made a joke at other people's misfortunes.

There was a procession of men with pails, and each time the contents of one were dashed on the flames there was a slight derisive sizzle, so that one of the water carriers remarked:

"You might as well spit at the thing, for all the good it will do."

The fire, aided by sudden, unaccountable gusts, was relentless, and clearly determined to make a thorough job of it. By dawn it died down to a few spasmodic outbreaks. It was dying hard, gasping. The charred, broken walls began to delineate themselves more and more sharply against the growing radiance spreading across the sky in long white spokes, like a magic fan, full of light and coolness. And as the outbreaks of fire died down to flickers, that part of the house which had once been Gombarov's machine shop now revealed a chaos of jagged, almost shapeless junk. Wheels and cog-wheels, and iron rods, and tangled wire, and shreds of belting, and yards of tortured zinc, and what not, lay

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there scattered in hopeless confusion—chaos of destruction. Only a row of charred crucibles, large and small, rested unperturbed on an inbuilt brick shelf of a wall partly left standing, like a brood of birds, inured to fire, perching.

Gombarova looked on this desolation and on those parts which went on smouldering and thought it was all a nightmare. But from time to time realisation penetrated the fog in which she was immersed, like a bird with a small beak of fire, and it pecked at her heart with small hot stings, very small at first, but growing deeper, and bolder, and more frequent.

"Oh my God, oh my God!" she moaned forsakenly.

Then she thought of her children and went back to them. All except Vanya were lying on the rescued bedding and trying to sleep, but Vanya was pacing up and down the small clay-paved room, and crying:

"Oh mother, what has become of you, oh mother, where are you?"

On seeing his mother Vanya embraced her wildly and sobbed with bitter joy. All worn out, Gombarova fell upon the bed prepared on the floor for her, but she could not sleep. For the little beak of fire continued to peck at her heart, while under her heart a new life stirred.

Early in the afternoon Gombarov arrived, with the official permit in his pocket to start his works. He walked from the station to the village. Many eyes, mostly of bourgeois cottagers, peeped at him stealthily from behind window curtains. For some reason a few felt a malicious joy at the misfortune of this strange man, very likely it was because they felt that his downfall was in some way a justification of their own comfortable respectability. In any case, they were burning to know how he would take it. There were others,

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chiefly peasants, who, holding the man in awe and taking no stock in the Antichrist story, sympathised with him genuinely. Gombarov, who had already been apprised of his misfortune by the station master, walked on oblivious of all eyes. The good Kharton, who had been on the lookout for him, followed him at some distance, and hesitated to speak. But when his master reached the scene of the fire and had stood for some time contemplating the result of many months' labours he walked up to him timidly with his hat off and remarked with hesitation:

"A misfortune, master."

"*Nitschevo....*," said Gombarov slowly in a voice free of all emotion.

Kharton looked up in astonishment at his master, but the latter did not say another word or give the slightest indication of his feelings in his face. He made his way through the débris, looked here and looked there, picked up this and that, put everything down nonchalantly; then, led by Kharton, he went to the cottage, where his family awaited him.

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CHAPTER XV

THE GOMBAROVS DECIDE TO EMIGRATE

THE Gombarovs took a small cottage on the outskirts of the village. They wanted time "to think things over."

There was too much for Gombarov to do to brood over things, but there were spare hours during which he could be heard pacing up and down his now small room according to his former habit. But the footsteps seemed slower and heavier, as if the growing burden of his mind poured itself in a clotted fluid through the arteries of his strong body and down his legs, whose movement it fettered as with a dull force which held back.

Perhaps it only seemed so to Gombarova. So many things seemed to her in those days. One day passing her husband's door, which was slightly open, she thought she heard a sob, and glancing in stealthily she saw that his face was calm and showed no outward signs of emotion. But if the thought of her husband sobbing gave her pain and a desire to comfort him, this appearance of calm hurt her even more, for she thought that if he was calm it was because the misfortune as far as it affected the family concerned him little; besides, if he had only come to her for comfort she would have felt comforted also.

Not that everything was lost, and they were wholly penniless. A good part of the burned property was insured, and the money would be coming in before long. And there was still a trifle left of the original capital. But it was not that which mattered, but the three re-

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corded failures, two ordained by Gombarov, the third by God: was it not all the same in the end? Once you begin life like that, it goes on like that. Once Misfortune comes through the door and takes a seat at your table, whether you like it or not you must press her to your heart and call her your friend. It's no use hinting that you are tired or bored, and that you'd like to see your friend Luck for a change. Whether she understands you or not, she'll take no hint, once she comes as a "permanent guest" with all her luggage of petty annoyances—that's the sort of a hussy she is! And when Luck comes along looking for a nice lodging and is greeted at the door by the mistress of the house, well, he can tell at once by looking into her eyes that Misfortune has taken up her "digs" there, and making a few polite inquiries he runs from the house without so much as leaving his name or address.

Gombarova tried to think when it was that she caught her first glimpse of Misfortune's face. And after racking her memory for some time she thought it might have been during that scuffle some years ago just before her first husband finally left the house, at that moment that Vanya entered the room and the terrified look on Vanya's face did not seem like his own; and now recalling that look it seemed to her as if her future stared at her with that same look, and that nothing again would restore its calm trust and nothing else again would make it smile its open smile free from all stealth. Yet how could that be? How could love and misfortune enter in together? Was not love a proud castle keeping all enemies at bay? Was not love a fire which burnt up all petty annoyances, withered up all fear? Did she not in changing her life act with supreme courage and shake everything from her for the sake of her love? No, she thought, she was selfish. She had only herself in mind, and her own joy and had no thought of the children.

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And at the thought of her children it now came with a full force upon her how badly she had neglected them. Poor Raya, poor Dunya, poor Vanya—children by her first husband—what had they to look forward to? And not alone they but Gombarov's own children—Katya and Absalom, and the unborn! But no, she thought again, it was not really that which worried her, for she knew that if he had only come to her and said: "Sonya dearest, I know how hard it is for you to bear, all this misfortune, and I know there are you and the children to think of, but don't think too much about it, dearest, everything will be all right in the end,"—then nothing would have mattered, and she would have borne everything gladly. Or if he had come to her and said: "Oh Sonya, what has happened has made me sad, put your dear hands on my head and soothe me"—then she would have borne everything gladly. And reflecting on her doubts in this way, she thought herself selfish, after all. If she really loved him, why shouldn't she endure his silence, why shouldn't she admire his strength which had perhaps too much pride to ask for comfort, why shouldn't she yield to him in all matters without questioning, without asking anything in return for what she gave? She knew that he had some such ideas on this subject, and she thought that it was possibly her mistrust, or shadow of mistrust, which had shut his tenderness up with lock and key. But how could she do this, she who had trained in a *gymnasia,* and had read Pushkin and Turgenev and Heine and loved the romantics?

Thus does misfortune open the gates to other misfortunes, and Gombarova bore everything with a stoical patience. Luckily, there were many practical affairs to be settled, and there were many consultations held between Gombarov and his wife. And there were signs of reawakened tenderness in him, which made matters easier to discuss. The first conclusion to be reached was

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that any new ventures could only be undertaken in a new place, the farther from the present scene the better. This was really a concession to his wife by Gombarov, who had no sentimental prejudice associated with places of misfortune. But no one was cruel enough to remind him about the warnings he had received with regard to his leasing the house from Mendel.

The question was where to go. They talked over many places and came to no conclusion. The great difficulty was the children, who, it was decided, ought to be near a place where their education could be attended to properly.

"Why not go to America?" one day suggested Vanya, who was re-reading his "Robinson Crusoe."

That was an inspiration. Both parents had had the thought for some time, and each was afraid to utter it.

"Yes, why not America?" cried Gombarov with a laugh, and was astonished at the reply:

"One might do worse."

It was settled that they should go to the new land of milk and honey.

But where? What city?

Again Vanya came with the suggestion. He read aloud from his geography book:

"Philadelphia," 'the City of Brotherly Love,' is celebrated for its public institutions, its hospitals, its schools, its free colleges of learning."

That appealed to Gombarova, who had not given up the idea of making a doctor of Vanya. After all there was the medical tradition of the family to live up to. She had nursed that idea so long that she could not now imagine Vanya as anything else but a doctor. And if their capital should ever be quite gone, "the City of Brotherly Love" with its great hospitality would open its many doors to them. An image arose in her mind of that wonderful house which had belonged to her great,

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great grandfather, a very pious Jew, who had lived to the age of 107. This house, which was not over-large, stood at the cross-roads, and it had four doors, one door facing each point of the compass, so that—the family tradition went—no hungry wayfarer should find a cold doorless wall staring in his face even at a distance. The old man was long gone and the old house did not long survive him. How could one live always subject to drafts? asked the new owner, who had it pulled down and had put in its place a house with only one door—the tradition goes on to say that this new house soon caught fire in the night, while its master was asleep, and that the flames cutting off his escape to the one door, he died in great agony and that nothing was left of him but his charred bones. It was hard to say how much truth there was in the latter part of the story, but no one doubted the story of the four-door house open at all hours to wayfarers from the east and the west and the north and the south. She had not for a long time thought of this story, which had been handed down from generation to generation, but by some curious association of ideas in her mind the description of Philadelphia read by Vanya evoked in her a clearer image of the old house, no longer existent, than she had ever experienced.

The Gombarovs were credulous folk. From the first to the last they were like children. That was perhaps because they had lived for so long away from other people and saw little of their relatives. Very likely it was because most people, relatives in particular, disapproved of Gombarov, whom they considered as an adventurer. Whatever the cause may have been, the Gombarov household had lived for many years in almost complete isolation. Almost the only people they came in contact with were the peasants, most of whom like the good Kharton were also children. But there was this difference: the

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Gombarovs, because of their race and intellectual strain, were not quite care-free or light-hearted, but were more like the children of old parents. They had not the smartness of people of their station who had lived long in towns, but as the blood of townsmen and of nomads was in them, an inherited restlessness hovered about them and caused a confusion in their souls, of the nature of which they were hardly aware. Vanya for one, young as he was, had already, because of this contactless life, developed a fear for his future. The idea that some day he would have to go among people and adopt a "career"—a word he had heard his mother speak so often—agitated him unpleasantly.

But like children they all believed implicitly the words in the geography book. The vision of Vanya's career rose like a mirage in Gombarova's thoughts, journeying thousands of miles.

And the matter was decided. They had only to wait until the insurance had been collected, and Gombarova was delivered of her child.

Vanya was proud of his part in the great decision.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE LEAVE-TAKING—VANYA'S DREAM

"FAREWELL, Russia! Farewell, Russia!" Vanya kept on saying to himself as the train trailed its way slowly across that part of land which separated the last Russian station from the first German one. Two very tall, elaborately decorated gendarmes had boarded the train a few minutes earlier and examined the passports of the Gombarovs, who had a whole third-class compartment to themselves. About a quarter of an hour later the same duty was performed by two gendarmes in a different kind of uniform and speaking in another tongue. And between these two points Vanya kept a very sharp lookout for some sort of mark which would show where Russia ended and Germany began. He thought there would be a fence, or a series of posts or a ditch, but there seemed to be nothing, only a flat, treeless field, with a cottage here and there. Someone in the corridor suddenly remarked: "This is the frontier." Vanya looked eagerly, but there was nothing; a few sentries in German uniform, marching up and down with fixed bayonets, were the only evidence that they were in Germany.

"Farewell, Russia! Farewell, Russia!" Vanya went on muttering.

Gombarova held the two-months-old baby in her arms. She could not afford to take Rivka along, indeed she could not afford any servant now. Gombarov himself remained behind. He was to join them later in America. The insurance affair was not quite settled,

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owing to the slowness into the inquiry about the cause of the fire. There were other matters besides which required his attention before he could start.

In Gombarov's place sat a much older docile-looking man with a beard, slightly resembling Gombarov. This was Gombarov's brother, Iakov Bogdanovitch, anxious to go to America to make his fortune, which made, he would send for his family, consisting of his wife and two children. Iakov's journey was being paid for by the more fortunate Simeon, who entrusted to him the care of his family during his absence. Iakov proved worse than useless. His knowledge of the Talmud, which might have earned him a meal and a night's lodging in a native village, was hardly the thing to appeal to a German official train guard, or hotel clerk. It is true he made lively and eloquent gestures with his hands, but they could not have proved more futile than if he had his arms tied in a strait-jacket. He only aroused amusement if not contempt in those to whom he tried to make himself intelligible, and would give up the effort by cursing the stupid *goyim*—gentiles—under his breath, in good Hebrew. Gombarova also grew contemptuous of him and often thought: "How could this man and her husband be brothers?" Leaving her baby in the charge of Raya or Dunya she would leave the train compartment or the station waiting room and go to make inquiries in German, which she spoke fairly well. Vanya, too, proved useful, and his German stood him now in good stead. Indeed, his knowledge of German quite astonished one fatherly looking station-master, who asked him how he had learnt to speak so well, and patted him on the head afterwards.

A curious episode occurred at Berlin.

The Gombarovs, in order to save expense, travelled part of the way thither in a fourth-class waggon, which

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is more or less like the ordinary luggage car, except that there is a long bench against the wall on either side, and as the windows are rather high, the passenger, if he happen to be a small boy, must stand up on this bench in order to look out. As this was very tiresome Vanya saw little on the way and only when the train got to Berlin over an elevated road did he begin to look with great curiosity at what was going on outside; many years afterward he only remembered the neat window gardens and the shining helmets and lances of the soldiers, but the one thing he vividly remembered was a seemingly slight episode, which occurred a minute or two after the Gombarovs were bundled out with their numerous luggage from the car on to the platform.

While Gombarova with her children stood around their possessions waiting for directions, Vanya wandered away for a moment from the rest. And as he walked along and looked at this and that with the curiosity of a country child, a woman who wore no hat and who, for some reason, appeared to Vanya to belong to the station took him by the hand and saying to him something in German which he could not understand, led him to a door, then through a long corridor, paved and side-panelled with marble slabs, then still holding Vanya by the hand she turned a corner and walked through another corridor. Somewhat alarmed, Vanya addressed her nervously in German as to where she was taking him. She said something, but again Vanya could not understand her. Then they turned another corner, and the dream he had had on the night he had lain near Marta suddenly flashed across his mind and also the thought of his agitated mother looking for him on the platform. So suddenly wrenching his hand from the woman's he began to run frantically in the direction from which he had come, but the woman made no attempt to pursue him. On the way he bumped his head against one

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of the corners of a turning, and there was a swelling over one of his temples when he reached his mother, who was indeed frantic over Vanya's disappearance and, with her baby in her arms, was talking excitedly to a station official about it. She gave Vanya a scolding, and scolded him even more upon hearing what had happened, and Vanya, thoroughly subdued and frightened by his experience, said not a word, nor did he cry. But the memory of it remained with him, and like many other things that he remembered it sometimes seemed to him a dream, like the other dream—or was the other a reality, no less real than this?

Yes, the Berlin episode was a reality, and Vanya—that is, John Gombarov—many years afterwards, thought of it, when he did think of it, with smiling eyes, which, searching distances of time and space, saw himself a funny small boy running beside the unknown, his hand in hers. Who was she, and what did she want with him? What would have happened if he had gone along with her? He would never know. His smile remained immovable for a long time—like a mask's smile.

Other things happened—the usual things. The green of England—the green he grew to love later—flashed by in a broad ribbon as he sat in the train, and it remained in his memory, a splash of green on a painter's palette. But the many other things mixed themselves up tortuously and confusedly as in a nightmare or a Futurist picture.

The North Sea crossing was stormy, as was also the fifteen days' journey from Liverpool to Philadelphia, in a boat which was to carry back cattle. The last night on shipboard he had a dream:

He saw himself floating in a rough sea on a raft. There were others with him, clinging desperately, swept by the seas. The raft rose on each huge billow, and each time it came down some one was swept overboard;

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there was always one less. And at last he was alone. And still the billows swept on, and the raft rose and fell on them with a cradling motion. He was in sight of land. When would he reach it? Would he ever reach it? He was getting closer and closer. At last with a sudden sweep quite near the shore, the raft rose on a gathered wave, so that from the curved topmost crest of it Vanya could see the stones below him, and as he felt he was about to be dashed upon them he gave a loud frantic cry, his heart jumped with fear, and he woke up. He heard his mother ask:

"What is the matter, Vanya, darling?"

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PART II: AMERICA

To H. D.

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THE TRANSPLANTING

O to struggle against great odds, to meet enemies undaunted!
To be entirely alone with them, to find how much one can stand.
—WALT WHITMAN.

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PART II

CHAPTER I

A PRELUDE, IN WHICH A CERTAIN WARNING IS REPEATED

"It was a city of stone. Stone and brick. The houses were of bright red brick, each brick marked off from the other by a strip of white cement; the pavements were also of brick, indented here and there through rough usage with an occasional hole where a brick had been removed or broken; the streets were paved with rough rounded cobble and the carts and the drays went over it jolting and rattling and left in their wake a slowly settling trail of stone dust. The people, too, I soon discovered, at any rate, many of them, had hearts of stone."

"Come, come, Gombarov," said Gombarov's *vis-à-vis* over a table in an A.B.C. shop in London. "You mustn't exaggerate, you mustn't let your personal prejudices run away with you. It couldn't have been as bad as all that. And all cities are of stone as far as that goes. Can there be anything more stone than London?"

"My dear fellow," said Gombarov with a note of tolerant irony in his voice, "it makes all the difference in the world as to whose back came in contact with the stones, yours or mine. It happened to be mine. That's the sort of reception I received in the City of Brotherly Love. You would say that there were extenuating circumstances in that I first appeared in the streets in my Russian costume, fresh from the Russian woods, but then remember that we had first stopped over in Liver-

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pool for three weeks waiting for our boat, and though we lived there in a hotel bordering on the slums and the streets were full of noisy and ragged children, yet if I was sometimes chaffed I was never bodily molested. But I no sooner appeared in the streets of Philadelphia than a crowd of boys gathered round me and followed me, and shouted after me words I did not then understand—one word, above others, sounded and resounded in my ears; it was the word *'sheeny,'* meaning 'Jew,' as I discovered later. I walked on in fear and trembling. I walked on faster and faster to get away from my tormentors, but they followed me. On the way I met many men and women, and I thought some of them would take pity on me and protect me, but they only looked at me and laughed. At last I burst into tears and began to run, and quite as suddenly a lot of missiles began to fly about me, something hard and sharp struck my back. I fell, got up again, and ran on as fast as my legs could carry me. That was my first contact with humanity after leaving the Russian woods, and I think I can understand very well now how a man must feel when he has fallen unaware into a jungle and suddenly finds himself shied at by the monkeys with cocoanuts. And that was only the beginning. So you see, I was quite right in saying it was a stone city."

"Why do you say 'was'?" asked Gombarov's companion. "As far as I know, Philadelphia is still on the map."

"I say 'was,'" explained Gombarov, "because it does not seem to me now, looking backward on my life there, like a place, but like a nightmare, like something that has happened to me and is not likely to happen again. It 'was' because it now seems like a terrible unreality, and it exists for me no more than a past delirious illness exists for me, though there is this difference: I can remember much if not everything that I saw and heard

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in my delirium. I know that you think I exaggerate, but you must bear in mind that I came to this place of stone and iron from quiet, far away woods and meadows, and my whole being was permeated with the rustle of trees, with the gentle, monotonous crooning of Russian folk songs and my eyes had been used only to sunflowers and poppies and golden cornfields. Imagine to yourself such a being, a child, touched with brooding and with a sense of introspection thrust suddenly into a place so violent in movement, so strident in sound, so teeming with people and commerce as an American city; if one of God's own cherubim were dropped on earth suddenly, his predicament could not have been more startling than that of this child. Imagine to yourself further the need of this child to enter almost as suddenly into the struggle for existence in circumstances so ludicrously tragic—only then you may have some idea of the will that is at the root of human life. You will perhaps say that as my conclusions about America are due to my personal experience your statement about my prejudice is proven. My own opinion is to the contrary. It seems to me that only he can judge who approaches a subject with a perfect innocence of eye, and with a mind and heart as yet untainted by the environment upon which he expresses judgment."

"That is all very well," persisted Gombarov's companion, "but it doesn't explain your first statement. In what way is Philadelphia or New York more a city of stone than London? It seems to me, you can wear out shoe leather as quickly here as in any other place."

"Your question is a reasonable one, and I am prepared to answer it," rejoined Gombarov. "Your last statement is indeed an excellent hook to hang my answer on, for though it is true that you can wear out shoe leather in London as quickly as in New York, yet I am foolish enough to maintain that shoe leather is not such an

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intrinsic part of our being that we cannot afford to part with it from time to time, as long as our more sensitive parts are not affected. The real trouble with New York is not that it wears out our shoe leather but that it tends to make our sensitive skins tougher than any shoe leather and not less impregnable against all finer feelings than against stone. Men become like limpets, shutting themselves out equally from danger and light."

"I am beginning to understand what you are driving at," interrupted Gombarov's friend. "You are apparently trying to make a distinction between stone and stone, and I am curious enough to know what that distinction is."

"I was coming to that," said Gombarov quietly. "In the first place, I use the word stone both literally and figuratively. London stone is Portland stone. It belongs to England as marble belonged to Greece. It is at one with the soil, the atmosphere, the character of the people. And being part of a oneness the London stones do not cry out at you. All things blend as in a tone painting. It took an American painter, Whistler, to discover that. Again you see the value of the innocent alien eye. But the native painter, the Dionysian Englishman Turner, must react from the grey and beautiful mystery; and the world of revelry so completely shut off within himself bursts out irresistibly on canvas in great splashes of primal yellows and orgies of fire, like suns in the making. But if Portland stone belongs to London, London has a way of making everything alien her own, be it man or marble. It is as if all of London were plunged in some curious chemical solution, which, if it did not harden men, humanised as by some magic the stones. Strictly speaking, there are no Londoners, yet everyone who comes to London and stays here any length of time becomes a Londoner, though he may have come from the other end of the earth. London with all its character

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is strangely impersonal, like the sea itself. No place is more beloved of the exile. But to go on with my comparison. There are few sharp edges here, the streets are mostly rounded at the crossings, giving the place a sense of continuity, vehicles are not forced to turn with sharp jerks. The 'lights of London' suggests a vast steady radiance like the aura of a planet, the 'rumble of London' hints at a mood steady and impressive like a silence so that even a silence-loving literary worker may have a room near the Strand and work in perfect obliviousness of the world around him; again he may live five minutes' walk from Piccadilly yet have that strange sense of being a thousand miles from the metropolis of the world. But in New York you have the so-called 'great white way' and the sense of its cutting across the city—a canal of light, which breaks at Forty-Second street like a torrent over a dam; at irregular intervals an overhead train shoots like a noisy gigantic shuttle across a loom that has suddenly gone out of order, and generally speaking the noises are sudden, sharp, screechy, acting upon your thoughts like a wicked child with new trumpet and drum; the buildings themselves reach upward—huge, uneven, jagged teeth, eager after the manner of Babel to bite into heaven, yet never so far away from it. Not that all this has not a certain beauty, vulgar and diabolic, like an animated rasp-voiced chansonnette, acting forwardly, flaunting her jewels and her vulgar charms at every new-comer, who learns quickly to know all her whims and wishes and every nook and part of her until she has nothing more to reveal, and a man, unless he revolt against her persistent demands on his body, soul and purse, becomes in the end a debauchee from sheer habit. I have just mentioned the purse, for the purse is important if one would enjoy this harlot among cities, whose great lyric is

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"'If you haven't any morey,
You needn't come around . . . .'

But London tries men, makes men woo her, and reveals only gradually her seductions to those deserving of her, and has not yet found a lover to whom she has completely surrendered herself. After all, she has permitted Whistler no more than to kiss her hand. No one has as yet painted a picture or written a book worthy of her. As for money, ''tis trash.' I know a young man with little more than genius to his account, to whom all doors are open, he could go among peeresses if he liked and if it weren't such a waste of time. That absurd contrivance 'Seeing New York' or 'Seeing Philadelphia,' a motor car designed to carry several dozen passengers who are aptly named 'rubber necks,' is impossible here; there is no seeing London. If you stay here a year and keep your wits about you you will begin to be cognisant of the gradually unfolding charms of this most wonderful creature, and only then when you have gone away from her for a spell will you learn how completely she has captivated you, and thereafter wherever fortune take you the call of London remains in your heart like the voice of some terrorless sea, of enchanting mystery, of a benign sphinx, whose fingers reach out to you in moments of distress and, running through your hair, soothe your feverish exile thoughts as by magic, though as yet you have not seen her face."

"I am an Englishman," interrupted once more Gombarov's companion, "yet frankly, I do not see why you are so infatuated with London. To my way of thinking, with all due respect to you, if cities are to be compared to women, I should compare London to a flabby, amorphous female, sluttish in dress and habit, foggy in her complexion, one of her eyes blackened, stodgy in her conversation, sloppy in her sentimentality, a depraved

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creature half reeling her way home from the pub to feed her half starved brats on milk tainted with detestable bitter. As for me, I prefer Italy or Paris."

Gombarov laughed at this extravagant outburst of his friend, but quickly readjusting his face into a thoughtful, almost motionless mask, he went on dreamily as if not he spoke but a spirit, a spirit which had taken lodgment in his body as in a kind of shell:

"You are the traditional Englishman with the Italian sun in your heart. And as you are an artist, it is well that you should contain this sun within yourself. It is the Englishman's creative impulse. It is this sun trying to burst the bounds of the body, coming in clash with the outer fog and the rain which 'raineth every day,' that has made your Shakespeare, who has laid most of his plots in Italy, though he had never been there. It is the same sun that has made your Turner, your Browning, your Byron, your Shelley and your Rossetti. Italy is the Englishman's spiritual home. And that is the fine thing about London, the supreme test of her creative love, for which she has sacrificed herself. For she has made herself unlovely to the Englishman that he might create; she has turned his eyes, as it were, against herself, like those cruel Neapolitans who pierce the eyes of their canaries that they may sing the more beautifully. But she is not really like that. She is cruel to herself, for the Englishman's eye turns inwardly, he is dazzled by his own sun, so that when he turns his eyes away from it again toward London, London seems to him like a wretched blur. And here is the strange contradiction: she offers a home to the alien, yet the artistic Englishman feels himself an alien here and never stops yearning for Rome or for Greece. True, there is Paris, but I somehow can't associate the Englishman with Paris, but with more remote times and places. What would Blake do without his Jerusalem, Browning without his Florence

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and Swinburne without his Athens? And yet Paris is adorable, and to him whom she loves she is both model for his art and mistress for his manhood. She is indeed Goya's 'Maya,' Maya veiled and Maya unveiled; veiled and very beautiful to the public, and to the stranger; naked and more beautiful to the French artist, for who but a Frenchman, with his clear vision, his mellifluous speech, his elegant manners, his unwavering passion, his genius for love—or shall we say love making?—can hope to win the favours of this most beautiful and exclusive of all courtesans, to the hem of whose dress self-exiled Americans, with all the Parisian affectations and with none of the Parisian genius, cling in desperate and forlorn hope. If they have money she takes it, without so much as a 'thank you'; if they are women she will sell them some of the secrets of her boudoir, which she exposes seductively in the shops; if they are painters she will admit them to the galleries in her apartments stacked with works of art presented to her by favoured admirers, though certain doors remain discreetly closed; if they are literary men, she will give them, with infinite pains on their part—for speech is not the universal art that painting, music or sculpture is—crumbs of ideas soaked plentifully in black coffee, wine or absinthe; they learn bad French and their English suffers; there grows up in their poisoned and benighted souls a contempt for London, which is the rod and the staff of all who write English."

"It seems to me there is much truth in what you say, Gombarov, and I am rather amused that you should put the matter in such clear sensual images, and if I did not know you better I should call you a downright sensualist. But there is a strange idealism in your sensuality."

"The two are inseparable," observed Gombarov. "All true idealism proceeds from sensuality and seeks its expression in refined sensuality. In religious men and

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artists this sensuality strives ever toward chastity. The monk in his small clean cell performing a genuflexion before a small image of the Immaculate Virgin, flanked by two large candles, is one form of this expression. Botticelli, drawing in 'Primavera' his pregnant women in chaste outlines against a background of dream, is another. Again you find chastity running to sensuality, otherwise how can you explain Christianity accepting Solomon's 'Song' as a tribute to itself? And yet, in spite of this poem's sensuality, its outlines are chaste and austere; every expression is an image, clear, hard, hewn out, edged and rounded, there is no cosmic froth in it, no atmosphere, which is an abominable modern invention, rather does every image give out its own radiance and colour like a precious stone. And the curious thing is that the greater the love, the more does it tend toward abstraction, the more precise becomes the image in which it is expressed. And in the measure that I love London I see her more and more clearly as the chastely outlined queen, silver-girdled by the Thames, of the kingdom of creative chaos, beside whom Paris is an obviously beautiful woman, and New York a parvenu and a harlot ambitious to become courtesan through indiscriminate patronage of art."

Gombarov stopped speaking and went on looking dreamily into the distance. Then his friend suddenly recalled him to himself:

"You began by speaking of Philadelphia and your experience there. What sort of woman is Philadelphia?"

Gombarov knit his eye-brows and made a wry face, but did not respond at once. He appeared to be in a difficulty, his mind seemed to be wrestling to get a hold on a clear image.

"You have given me a poser," he said at last slowly. "You see it's this way. Philadelphia has not the mystery of London, nor the charm of Paris, nor the blatant har-

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lotry of New York, nor the begrimed industry of Liverpool, yet she is not without some mystery, without some charm, some harlotry, some grime. But now I have it! I should say she was a dowdy housewife, who might be charming and respectable if she did not so neglect herself. She has a beautiful girdle in the Delaware, but it is frippery at the edges, unbordered by trees or embankments. She has a gem of priceless value in the several art collections stacked in private houses and she could display this gem if she would provide a setting for it, that is a gallery, yet she tarries because of the expense of this trifle. Her own servants rob her, wherefore she has been called the most corrupt city of the world. She spends much of her time chattering over thimble-sized tea-cups and in trying to keep a decayed family tree in bloom instead of looking to her young saplings. She has built with lamentable slowness and at a preposterous cost an ugly town hall and has placed on top of its five-hundred feet tower a statue of William Penn with his hands hanging down at his sides. If this statue could only come to life it would wring its hands to heaven, and receiving no response to its prayer it would turn on its pedestal, spit to all four sides upon the town and hurl itself below in its despair. The fact is, the town was unfortunate at its birth, for the architect who planned it cut the streets in checker-board fashion, and it has continued to expand on the same square lines. Nothing can present a more dismal sight than West Philadelphia as you look down on it from the overhead railway on Market street. You see thousands upon thousands of little stone houses all alike, placed in endless rows, separated only by long straight and narrow streets and little square back-yards, giving the place an aspect of a huge, artificial honeyless bee-hive, all so deadening to young imaginations and impressing upon young brains not those interesting convolutions which make London

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like a great fascinating throbbing brain but a dull square pattern in which each cell is like the cell of a mausoleum, containing its urn of dead ashes."

"I notice it hasn't deadened your imagination," said Gombarov's friend.

"No, very likely it has enriched mine," said Gombarov, ignoring the insinuating irony in his companion's voice. "But that is because the experience came after my boyhood years in the Russian woods, and the contrast made America seems like a hell to me. Once you recognise your environment as hell, you can use that hell's fire to set your imagination aflame. Hell is always imagination. It was only this clash between the inner and the outer world which saved me. And in this clash the wood god triumphed over Pluto."

"The manageress is beginning to look at us," interposed Gombarov's friend. "That means we are occupying valuable space."

"Don't speak of it," exclaimed Gombarov. "It reminds me too much of New York. I am afraid London is becoming Americanised."

"Well, come, let us go to my studio, where you can tell me more about that extraordinary place, called America."

"Right-o!" said Gombarov, rising from his place.

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CHAPTER II

THE OLD MANTLE OF AHASUERUS DESCENDS UPON YOUNG VANYA

After Vanya's first encounter with humanity in the streets of Philadelphia—described many years afterward to his English friend, who accepted the narrative as an exaggerated and prejudiced statement of an unhappy personal experience—Vanya's mother, to his great joy, decided to buy him a suit, which she did with not a few qualms, for Gombarov was away, her ready capital small, the family large, and the need for economy pressing.

The new suit was an event in Vanya's life. He was proud of it, and particularly of its many pockets; each separate pocket gave him as much pleasure as though it were a nest which contained a bird's egg. He felt important as he strutted up and down the room, his hands in his trousers pockets, as he had seen his stepfather do. Very likely, he realised, as yet vaguely, that pockets implied possessions, therefore power, therefore a shield against such annoyance as the simple, pocketless garment had subjected him to the day before. Something urged him to put this as yet subconscious idea to the test. He wanted to parade his new garment in the street. As he was going through the door his mother admonished him:

"See that you don't soil your suit."

The street was alive with children, who played in pairs or in groups or scampered in divers directions. Vanya had not far to go before he came upon a group of boys,

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some of whom he recognised as his persecutors of yesterday. And in spite of his new suit they knew Vanya almost at the same instant. They left their play and surrounded him. One of them walked up to Vanya, felt Vanya's new suit with his fingers and said something to his fellows, whereat they laughed derisively. Another walked up to Vanya, and felt his suit as the other did, only that he pinched Vanya through his jacket at the same time. They began to exchange remarks and to laugh. Vanya stood there paralysed, his heart beating, perspiration running down his forehead. Something clutched at his throat, tears almost welled in his eyes, but he somehow with a desperate effort held them back. Then one of the boys pointed to his hat and another to his shoes, at which the rest set up a derisive shout and held their sides with laughter as they turned on their heels. Vanya then realised that they were laughing at his Russian hat and shoes and that his American pockets were not enough, since he could hide neither his head nor his feet in them. He started to run, but one of the boys caught him by his arm, another snatched his hat, and when he tried to seize it the boy tossed it to another boy, who in his turn tossed it to another, and this manœuvre kept Vanya running frantically from boy to boy in the vain effort to get his hat.

Some of the passers-by stopped to look in evident enjoyment of the "game." They had been boys themselves once, and one or two looked as if they were rather ashamed that they were too old to join in. Indeed they rather resented an old Jew with a long beard when he attempted to interfere, and they joined the boys when they gave the usual cry accorded to bearded Jews:

"B-z-z-z-z-z!"

This was followed by a guffaw as one of the boys darting nimbly past the Jew gave a sharp tug at his beard and ran.

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Vanya, alarmed at this bold procedure and afraid of possible hurt, made off as fast as his feet could carry him, leaving his hat as booty in the hands of the boys.

Vanya came home crying. He related all that had happened and was reprimanded for losing his hat.

"Something of the sort is always happening to you," said his mother, recalling to him his previous loss of the fez.

"They would have taken away my shoes too," retorted Vanya, "if they weren't fastened so tightly on my feet. And now I shan't go out of the house until I get a new hat and new shoes."

Nothing would move Vanya from this decision. His mother was reluctant; there was nothing left to do but to get the hat and shoes. She did this that same evening.

Now Vanya felt thoroughly Americanised. Now he felt the boys in the street would respect him. There was happiness for him that he looked like others, all the more since that appeared to be the best means for safety.

Next morning Vanya once more set out proudly, sure that his new guise would prevent his being molested and yet trembling at the thought of his last two encounters. He walked quite far without being stopped by anyone, though he passed a number of boys. It is true he felt apprehensive whenever they looked at him, for it seemed to him that they looked at him rather doubtfully, whereat he increased his pace. Still, he rejoiced at the immunity he had enjoyed so far, and was congratulating himself on his good fortune at the very moment that he was entering the Italian neighbourhood. As Vanya did not know an Italian from a Hottentot, the different appearance of the people interested him, and as he walked, his hands in his side-pockets, his shoulders hunched, he looked curiously at the women carrying bundles of wood on their heads without the aid of their hands and at the strange fruits displayed in the windows. Soon he came

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upon two hatless, barefoot boys, who, crouching on the pavement, were playing a game with small round stones. Vanya had never seen a game of marbles before and so he passed by lingeringly. On their part the two Italian urchins seemed all of a sudden sharply aware of Vanya's presence, for one of them jumped up, seized Vanya by the arm, and said something which Vanya did not understand but which was undoubtedly a demand of some sort. Vanya shook his head and said tremblingly:

"I no understand."

"Shell out!" repeated the boy, pointing now to a marble, now to Vanya's pockets.

Vanya suddenly understood the nature of the boy's demand.

"I no have," replied Vanya.

It was quite clear that the boy was not satisfied with the answer, for as he still held on to Vanya he proceeded to feel Vanya's pockets with his free hand. Disappointed in his search, he was about to let Vanya go, but reconsidered, and, thrusting his face forward toward Vanya's, said something full of menace.

Vanya's heart sank. He feared the boy would snatch his new hat. A desperate courage was born in Vanya at the thought of this possible calamity. Tears had just come into his eyes, then with a sudden vigorous movement he wrenched himself from the boy's hold, and no less quickly and vigorously he thrust his two open hands forward and gave the boy a push; then, without waiting to see the result of his manœuvre, ran as fast as his legs could carry him, as yesterday, as the day before yesterday. The boy, getting on his feet, for Vanya's unexpected attack felled him, ran in pursuit of Vanya, in which he was joined by his companion, who had been sitting on the pavement, a witness to the whole performance. For some time Vanya was conscious of their being hot on his heels, at one time the fist of one almost grazed one

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of his shoulders, but in the end he was relieved to see them give up pursuit. He kept on running for some time, in fear that they would resume it.

Vanya told no one at home about his adventure.

"Vanya," said his mother the next day, "why do you sit moping in the house? Why don't you go out and play? To-morrow you begin going to school."

Vanya went out reluctantly, and reconnoitred in the neighbourhood for a long time before venturing farther. Though the exploit of yesterday was the source of much pride to him, he was far from anxious to get into any more broils. He walked cautiously, with a timid heart, half shrinking within himself, and keeping a sharp look-out for boys that he might avoid them, for he now regarded all boys as his enemies.

Early next day Vanya applied at the nearest school. The principal made Vanya wait a long time in her office, and as he sat there fingering his cap his mood was more akin to that of a guilty prisoner awaiting trial than that of a young boy waiting to enter school. He suddenly realised that a few minutes would pass and that he, a woods boy, would be thrust as by an unseen, inevitable hand, over which he had no control and to whose prowess he had already been a witness, from a world of trees into a world of boys, and the thought of it frightened him. While he was reflecting dismally upon the unkindness of this new world, the principal came in again and beckoned to Vanya to follow her.

Again Vanya walked through a series of corridors, this time by the side of a pale, austere, thin-lipped woman, and as the corridors were lined with leaded glass Vanya watched with a strange, inexplicable agitation the small dark blurs which stirred slightly on either side of him.

At last they got to a small corridor, which culminated in a cul-de-sac, Vanya's guide pausing before the penulti-

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mate door, at which Vanya's heart gave a jump. Then she opened the door and Vanya followed her timidly in.

Panic seized Vanya upon seeing so many faces and feeling all eyes fixed on him. It was as if so many needles had suddenly touched his skin. The principal said a word to the school-mistress; they both laughed; and then the principal went out.

The school-mistress, a grey elderly woman, smiled slightly at Vanya from behind her spectacles, but Vanya was too dazed to notice her smile; at that moment her face resolved itself for him into a vacant countenance, bereft of all features save a mouth, a long narrow slit cut across the wrinkled skin as with a single stroke of a sharp knife. He saw this mouth move, heard the sound of words. He had a curious feeling that the words were addressed to him. He only roused himself when they were repeated. He knew a few words of English, which he had studied in a grammar during the journey, but he could not understand her. She called for a Russian boy in the class to interpret.

"Ask him his name."

The boy repeated the question in Russian.

"Ivan Borisovitch Gombarov," replied Vanya, gathering up his courage.

The school-mistress laughed, the children in the front rows giggled.

"Well, let's see what we can do to Americanise it; you must become an American now, my boy. To begin with, suppose we call you John, Ivan is John, isn't it? Your middle name is . . . "—and the school-mistress hesitated.

"Borisovitch," said Vanya, now John, and explained: "My father's name is Boris. It means son of Boris."

"Suppose we lop off the 'vitch' part of the name, it won't do you any good here, except to annoy busy people. Let's call you John Gom . . . what is it?"

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"Gombarov," prompted John.

"Sounds like Gumboil," laughed the school-mistress, amused at her own joke, and as she said this loud enough to be overheard by the whole class there were many chortles and giggles. For once she did not call the class to order, for after all not to laugh at a clever thing betokens a slim sense of humour, and she was glad to see that her class had this virtue developed in a reasonable measure.

As for John, he stood there as in a trance, overcome by confusion and shame, as before a tribunal or an executioner, so that it might have been as easy at that moment to lop off his head as the "vitch" off his name. The smile on his face seemed not his, but glued on, but it served its purpose, a dyke to hold the tears back.

But soon the ordeal was over, and he was given a place at the bottom of the form. It did not take the school-mistress long to discover that the new boy's knowledge of arithmetic was far above the needs of her class, which was the second primary grade, and he was slightly older than the rest of the pupils, but owing to his ignorance of English it was decided to keep him there.

Recess came and Vanya marched out in the line with the rest into the recreation yard. Once in the yard, the new boy was surrounded by a constantly changing little crowd in which voices cried "Gumboil" at him; but he felt greater friendship in the few voices which addressed him simply as "Gomby."

Afterwards on being left more or less to himself, he walked about in a lost way, and looked with longing eyes toward the swings, the trapeze and the other contrivances of play. He saw a boy now and then push his way forward boldly and displace another boy and he envied the displaced boy as much as the one who replaced him. As he walked about in this half-dazed manner, wishing he could take a share in the happy turmoil, he suddenly

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came upon a pump, by the side of which a half-rusty tin cup hung on a chain and he realised that he was thirsty. At that moment a boy ran by, who, divining John's intention, paused for hardly more than an instant, but long enough for him to put a finger under the spicket and send a small but rapid stream shooting into John's face. Then he ran on and lost himself among the other boys.

One of the school-mistresses, who had come out with a bell to call the recess to an end, found John crying, surrounded by a crowd of boys. An effort was made to find the culprit, who after the way of culprits made good his escape. There was nothing left for John to do but to wipe his face and to resume his seat in his class. He sat there quietly, with a subdued air, riveted to his seat by invisible nails; dull pains, like flames, converged upon his heart, which boiled and seethed with injury and humiliation, and this boiling and seething found egress in the eyes, their only safety valve, which shone with a dulled lustre, like bright copper from behind escaping steam. But suddenly his eyes brightened. Is was as if that which boiled and seethed had ceased to boil and seethe and that which was half-hidden and dulled by a vaporous tissue were polished and cleansed and shone richly with high-lights out of darkened corners. It is hard to tell whence and how, but a thought came to the boy. Not so much a thought as a fancy, a little white bird let loose suddenly from one of the many cages of memory. Without seeking to recall, he recalled at that moment a fairy tale he had read a long time ago about a wood wizard who turned a wandering prince into a tree; he thought how fine it would be if he could turn all these boys into trees, scraggy little twisted trees, because they were so wicked to him. He had already done this in his imagination, and the fancy pleased and consoled him. He was now a woodsman strolling through this wood

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with an axe, lopping off the more malicious looking of the branches. He was smiling a little to himself.

"John Gombarov!" he heard his name called in the midst of his adventure. "You are not listening."

It was the school-mistress, with a pointer in her hand, before the blackboard, who spoke.

On hearing his name called, John roused himself. Again he felt the eyes of the whole class upon him, and his face flushed.

He was commanded to read the words on the blackboard, which he did in a faltering voice but evidently with greater knowledge than he had been expected to show, for the school-mistress prompted him only rarely and had no need of calling for an interpreter. She thought it an excellent performance for a foreign boy only a few days in the country. On his part, because he had been called to order and had to be prompted at all, he felt that he had failed and resumed his seat in a crestfallen mood, a mood which stayed with him until he returned home.

He found all the children gathered in the kitchen, for the Gombarovs had only two rooms now. The table was set for lunch, and Gombarova herself was expected to return almost any moment from shopping. Raya was holding Sonyatchka in her arms, while Dunya was preparing the cups for cocoa. They assailed their brother with questions, for they too were to be sent to school within a few days. They were very much amused at his new name, and Dunya took especial delight in calling out now and then, oftener than the occasion required:

"Djohn!"

As for John, he went with his school books into the next room and happening to pass a mirror he paused to survey himself in it. He made a very grave face and wondered why it was that he was so annoyed and per-

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secuted and why he felt so different from the other boys.

Was it because he was a Jew and a "Christ-Killer"? he reflected. But no, that was not possible, because he had noticed two or three Jewish boys in that first encounter. Was it his appearance? But he had been persecuted since he had got his new suit nearly as much as before. Was it his face? It must be his face. And he looked intently at his own image in the mirror. What then was wrong with it? He studied his face for a long time. It was to all appearances like other faces, yet somehow different. There was something in the eyes which he did not quite understand. And his thick hair, which grew vigorously, would not lie still on his head, refused to stay combed, but uprose rebelliously in all directions, so that in spite of all his efforts with brush and comb, his head nearly always had an unbrushed, unkempt appearance, and tufts of hair stuck unevenly from under his cap when he went into the street. If it was his face which attracted the hostility of the boys why was he given it? Why did everyone try to torment him? And he continued to look broodingly into the mirror. He thought: Whether he looked different or not, he knew that he *felt* different. Just what this difference was he did not know, but he did know that in this difference lay all his unhappiness. He wished he were like other boys, that he could play like them, be happy like them. And lost in his brooding the thought born in an unhappy moment in the Russian woods came upon him again:

"I wish I were dead."

And lost in this brooding as in a mist, it departed from him like a mist. Again a fairy tale fancy came to console him. An image of a wood goblin he had seen in the long ago in his fairy book rose in his mind, and as he looked in the mirror he screwed up his face and strove

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to look like him. He was astonished at his success and at the variations he could give his mimicry.

It was at this unlucky moment that his mother came into the room. John quite suddenly saw her in the mirror overlooking his shoulder, and the goblin as if frightened vanished from his face. The boy's heart gave a jump.

"So this is what you have learnt at school!" he heard his mother say, and there was no heart left in him to retort or to tell her of the sadness of that morning.

He timidly followed his mother into the kitchen, and sat down before a bowl of soup.

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CHAPTER III

THE GOMBAROVS BEGIN THEIR NEW LIFE

A BLEAK day, in a bleak narrow street, still more darkened and cooled by the tall buildings. Drays passing, dozens of wagons waiting, newspaper presses whirring noisily under your feet, steam oozing out of gratings in the pavement; cries, often profane, of draymen and newsboys and sausage vendors; everywhere flashes of white—torn newspapers littering the street; large letters, too far apart to be read quickly, sprawling high across the buildings, too ugly to be defaced; still higher overhead wires, hundreds of them, running in all directions.

"It was chaos, ungodly chaos," said John Gombarov, speaking of it many years afterward. "Man's imagination is wonderful, if vile, to have invented it. And just as the face of God reflected itself in the waters which swept across the original chaos, so the hand of Satan showed itself in every detail which went to the making of this new chaos."

On that bleak day, in that bleak narrow street, hundreds of men and boys kept pouring in through a very broad door of the central building and pouring out again with large stacks of newspapers under their arms. They came out shouting the name of the paper. Inside the building, in a large room, lit up by garish incandescent lights, a long line of boys moved squirming past a counter, caged off by wire netting, through a hole in which at the other end a man in shirt sleeves would hand out the papers to each succeeding boy. The boys, who were of

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all sizes, and for the most part ragged and dirty, moved forward unevenly and jostled one another rather roughly and made forward and backward thrusts with their elbows and feet on the least provocation, sought a provocation when there was none, and accompanied each movement and thrust with a gibe or an oath.

"Stop your shovin'," said a big bully as he turned upon a small frightened boy behind him neater and cleaner than the rest. "Watsemarreh* with you? Do you think because yer mother washes yer face you're de boss of dis here shop?"

"I'm not pushing," replied the small boy timidly, "it's the boys behind me."

**"G'wan—go back to Jerusalem!" growled the bully in drawling, ranting accents.

Those within hearing laughed at this witticism.

The small boy, who was none other than John, once Vanya, shrunk within himself and said nothing. At that moment he would have gladly gone to Jerusalem, or Jericho, or Bagdad, anywhere out of that place, for he could not imagine a more wretched world than the one he was already in.

At last he got his papers and he ran out crying his wares like the rest in a voice which did not sound to him like his own. His slender cry seemed lost in the midst of the jarring, grating noises of that unechoing street, and he had not shouted loudly since the old days, barely more than three months ago but which seemed as many years, in the woods, where the slenderest cry that he uttered grew into a resonant din lost somewhere among the trees as among the reeds of a giant organ.

Presently he stopped in another newspaper office and a few minutes later at a third and added to his stock of papers. He ran up Chestnut Street, a thoroughfare erect

* "What's the matter?"
** "Go on!"

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and unbending with pride and virtue, in which every untoward appearance, deviating however slightly from local custom, provoked astonishment or amusement. And in these amused and astonished glances the bold and daring of the city's architect shone eloquently forth. For in a street so simple, so straight, so narrow, so honestly conceived, and bound as it were in its infancy to a straight plank like an Indian child, it was natural that any appearance conceived, born and nourished in other circumstances less simple, less erect, less blunt, was foredoomed to become in the eyes of the native like a thing that is strange, or warped, or peculiar, or merely amusing, so that he swelled with pride, and superiority and condescension not less at the vision of an Englishman's spats than at the itinerant rug merchant's fez.

There was not alone this condescension, if not aversion, to peculiar appearances, for with it went a deeper intuition of deep-souled ingrained qualities even more antagonistic to the native's character. For John, though he wore neither the foreign merchant's fez nor an Englishman's spats, was yet so indelibly stamped with a nature irresistibly alien, if hard to define, that his American clothes, far from hiding his peculiarities, accentuated them to such a degree that had he actually been the wood goblin he had mimicked so successfully in the mirror his sudden appearance in Philadelphia's noblest thoroughfare could not have attracted more attention. Yet he was neither a goblin, nor a monstrosity, and his features were if anything more regular and distinguished than the average boy's, while his eyes at times shone almost feverishly against his dark skin. There was perhaps too much old-worldliness in his brown face, too much wistfulness in his grey eyes, to suit the taste of the complacent native, with his store of energy, hostile to sorrow. The gleam of fear in the boy's eyes, his hunted look, the utter sense of remoteness which some-

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thing in his appearance suggested, inevitably attracted the glance of many a passer-by, whose mind sheltered the embryo of a thought, as yet unuttered, hardly even formed: "A wretched little foreigner, but in time we shall make a man of him, take from him his benighted European heart and with it the look of misery on his face, and put in their place a true American heart and a look of contentment. We shall run him through a mangle and wring Europe out of his flesh and bones like dirt out of a garment."

At least that was how John Gombarov expressed himself years afterward in his picturesque way to his English *vis-à-vis* of the A.B.C. shop, who, interrupting Gombarov, observed:

"Your narrative interests me intensely, but I wonder whether you are not too sweeping in your generalisations. You appear to be actuated by too great a personal passion to be altogether an impartial witness. The trouble with you was that you were over-sensitive as a boy and your experiences happened to be unfortunate."

Gombarov laughed his ironic laugh, and replied:

"No, Will, you don't do me justice. America is quite beyond all human hate or pity. She is perhaps a great blind cosmic force, sometimes even for idealism, but like all cosmic things she fails in particulars. She is a generalisation, she is in fact a great energy, a Niagara Falls, not as yet harnessed properly. Didn't I write a book idealising her? That was of course before my last journey there. As for being over-sensitive, it's a thing which works both ways. For after all, only a sensitive being is capable of receiving such concentrated impressions of the character and psychology of a country. Indeed, coming fresh from the Russian woods, where even my own people left me alone, I was particularly impressionable to the rudeness of my new world. I was like a chaste, unused phonographic disk ready to record new

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voices, and if these voices sound at times rude and querulous, please remember that the voices and not the instrument are at fault. The Russians have a good saying: 'Don't blame the mirror if your face is crooked'."

"Go on with your story, I shan't interrupt again," said Gombarov's friend, William Douglass, who, with a painter's interest, watched, fascinated, the fluent mobility of the lines of his friend's face, a mask of vehement sincerity.

That was John's second day as a newsboy, having been initiated the day before by a boy who lived in the same house with the Gombarovs. He had considered himself successful on his first day, having sold no less than thirty papers, his entire stock, and made a clear profit of fifteen cents. Thus encouraged, he had procured a larger stock on the following day, forty to be exact, and ran up Chestnut Street, doing his best to imitate the cry of the other boys. His frail, hesitant cry penetrated only a few yards, but within its small radius its very hesitancy and frailty were a powerful magnet directing curious eyes upon the strange and timid-looking lad obviously unaccustomed to his task and surroundings. Nor was the boy himself insensitive to the interest he aroused, and this put further fetters on his spirit.

Discouraged by the few sales he had made so far, to his great joy he ran into the boy who had acted sponsor for him the day before. For a moment he lost his wistfulness and his face became transformed by a broad smile.

"How are you doing?" the boy asked him.

"Not very well. Sold only four copies," he replied. The boy's question recalled him to himself, and he became wistful again.

"I'll tell you what to do," said the boy. "Find yourself a corner and work it up. You may not do very well

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at first, but little by little you'll work up a lot of steady customers. I believe Seventh and Chestnut street is a free corner. Try it there, and maybe I'll look you up by and by."

John felt encouraged, and did as the boy told him. He placed himself at the suggested corner, and repeated one and the same cry:

"Pa-per-r-s . . . Pa-per-r-s . . . "

The day was growing bleaker, the streets darkened perceptibly, snow began to fall—as yet sparsely. Lights began to appear in the windows of the tall buildings. A man with a tall pole, at the top of which was a small flame, stopped to light the corner lamp. John watched him and wondered how the flame came to be there. The snow fell and melted, owing to the hot furnaces under the pavements. John's feet began to feel wet, his hands numb, from time to time he huddled himself in a doorway, or hopped up and down on his feet to keep warm. Men ceased to notice him. The buyers were few and he lost three sales because he did not have the proper change. Altogether he felt miserable, his heart was filled with self-pity, he wanted to cry. But he set his teeth hard, clenched his numbed fists, and with a powerful effort restrained himself. A courage seemed born in him of desperation, and his cry, squeezed as it were no longer from his throat but from his whole body, grew less hesitant, grew louder and bolder.

More and more lights sprang up in the buildings and in the street, and the snow growing thicker he paused now and then to watch its separate particles dancing in the blaze of the arc lights and the people moving like shadows in the haze below. Horse-drawn tram cars ran past him, packed full of people, the rear platform to the very step so overweighted with them that John wondered that it did not lift the fore part of the car off the tracks. The street too was becoming more crowded, people were

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going home to their dinners. Iron shutters and iron doors were being pulled down in the shops. The snow still fell, and the air grew warmer. John suddenly became aware of steam escaping from a grating. He went and stood over it. It was as if he had entered a warm room. The vapours caught him, embraced him, a warmth poured itself into his small body like a delicious hot drink. He felt as if he were melting and there were moments when he seemed to be in a trance. A wave of warmth swept upward, and he closed his eyes. A moment of forgetfulness came upon him, a little moment of dreaming. When he opened his eyes, he expected to find himself on top of a Russian oven, Marta bending over him and saying:

"What's the matter, Vanya darling; don't cry, my darling."

The warmth had quite melted him, and he was crying. But there was happiness for him in this flow of tears. It was as if they had accumulated, as if the sheer weight of them thus partly lifted from him had lightened his heart. Then he roused himself once more, and pulling himself together, he shouted in all his voice:

"Pa-per-r-s . . . "

As if so desperate a call could not pass without a response a tall dark figure hastened toward him through the haze.

"Have you got the *Star?*"

"Yes," said John, pulling out the paper.

"Give me change out of a dime, quick, I'm in a hurry," said the man. holding a coin in his hand.

John fumbled in his pocket and with some difficulty counted out the change and gave it to the man, who then thrust the dime into John's hand so quickly that before he had time to clutch it, the coin dropped through the grating.

John, acting on his first impulse, sprang from his

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warm shelter and dashed after the man. He ran several yards, elbowing his way now and then past pedestrians, who swore at him, and finally came upon a tall striding figure, which resembled his man. But when he came closer he knew that this was not he. He ran on farther and turned to look into the face of every tall man he caught up with. He had by this time reached the next crossing. This was a very busy crossing, and dark figures were darting in all directions. John paused here and stood looking through the snow mist, dazed by his failure. This time he was roused by a voice full of menace:

"Look-a-here, beat it, this is my corner."

"I'm . . . I'm . . . looking f-for a man . . ." stammered out John.

"Lookin' for a man, are you? Well, you ain't goin' to find 'im here. All de men on dis here corner are mine, see? Now get a move on!"

John moved on. Crestfallen, no longer minding the wet and the cold, he slunk back to his corner. He stood all huddled up over the grating, all immersed in his miserable thoughts. He knew as yet no curse words, and inarticulate curses ran in his whole blood and tortured him. But he cursed himself no less than the world. He was a coward and a good-for-nothing. What was the good of him? What was the good of the world? Why was he different? And again the thought returned to him:

"I wish I were dead."

But suppose death really came to him then, as it did to the little old man of the wood who was carrying a bundle of faggots on his bent back and was sick of life? What did the little old man in the fable say to Death when it came? The little old man said: "Help me to carry my wood." That was what the little old man said to Death. What would *he* say if Death suddenly appeared? Ah,

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he knew what he would say. "Help me to sell my papers. Find the lost dime for me under the grating. Pull the ear of the boy who spoke harshly to me." And the thought of what he would say somehow consoled him. Perhaps he did not really want to die.

Immersed in his thoughts, he heard his name called:

"John, how are you doing?"

It was his friend, who looked him up as he had promised.

"I've sold twenty, and I've got twenty left."

"Bad luck. That means you've got your money back. Well, never mind, you'll exchange your papers for new ones to-morrow, and so your papers will cost you less. You ought to make a handsome profit to-morrow. Let's go home now."

John walked along by the side of the boy, his head drooping, feeling very much like a slinking dog with his tail between his legs. He did not speak for some time. He was ashamed to tell the boy about the lost dime and that because of it he had not even his money back. At last he gathered courage and told him.

His companion said nothing for a while. He appeared to be thinking.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said at last as if an inspiration came to him. "I'll lend you a dime, and you can pay it back to me a cent a day. Then your mother needn't know, and you won't feel your loss so much. What do you say?"

"All right . . . " said John with hesitation, while his teeth chattered. He felt very grateful to the boy and did not know how to express himself. By the time they got to the house he was still wondering what to say.

When they were about to part in the hall, his companion said:

"You haven't thanked me yet."

John was confused. He realised once more how he

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had been neglected, and how different he felt from other boys because of this neglect. He had not been taught to thank, he had had so little occasion to thank, that he had come too little in contact with people to thank. And this boy made him feel very much abashed.

"I . . . I . . . thank you . . ." stammered out John.

Weighed down by embarrassment and shame, which settled in his heart, like a cloud, he entered the kitchen, and having flung his papers aside and taken his overcoat off, he joined the others round the big iron stove.

Raya and Dunya, their sleeves rolled up, their faces grimacing with pain, held their outspread hands over the stove, while their feet marked time noisily on the bare floor. They were indeed numb with cold, having just come in from the yard, where in a half-open shed they had spent some time over the wash-tub rinsing out the clothes. The large kettle was beginning to sing and its song was good to the ear. In the next room Gombarova was trying to get the baby to sleep, she hummed a Russian lullaby, the same one that John knew so well and loved:

"Sleep my baby, sleep my darling,
Bayoushki bayou. . . ."

The song grew lower and lower, and presently it stopped. John still sat with his head propped up in his hands, in an attitude of listening when his mother entered. She was about to ask him about the luck he had had that day, but her eye falling upon the large bundle of papers and noting the boy's passive attitude, so unlike his joy of yesterday, she refrained. Soon the table was set and all sat round before steaming bowls of soup. Big chunks of bread were handed round.

They ate ravenously, in silence, which Gombarova was the first to break.

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"Well, Vanya," she still called him Vanya sometimes —"I think you had rather a miserable time of it today . . . "

"Yes, I had," interrupted John, a deep flush coming in a wave on his face.

"You should have come home earlier. It was so cold."

"How could I? I had all my papers. No one would buy. I didn't want to bring them all home with me. As it is, I only sold half of them, so that I've just got my money back—but my papers will cost me less tomorrow, for I shall exchange those I haven't sold for new ones."

He said all this quickly, as if anxious to get it over and at the same time to console his mother with tomorrow's prospects. He saw that his mother had a worried look, and at that moment his pity for her swallowed up his pity for himself. He had not the heart to tell her about the lost dime. And he felt humiliation not only at his loss, but at the deception he played on his mother.

Supper over, they all sat themselves round the stove.

"Vanya," said his mother, seeing his face buried in his hands and his eyes looking into red embers, which showed through the grate, "what of your lessons?"

John went into the next room and returned with a book. The baby gave a waking cry as he re-entered.

"Schlemil," said his mother and went in to rock the baby to sleep again.

Raya held Absalom in her arms and tried to amuse him, Dunya sat mending a garment. John held the book in his hand and lifting his head high went on repeating interminably:

"George Washington is the Father of His Country . . . George Washington is the Father of His Country . . . George Washington is the Father of His country . . . "

Dunya was in a teasing mood.

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"If George Washington is the Father of His Country," she addressed her brother, "who is the mother?"

"There isn't any mother."

"No mother? How can that be, you silly?" said Dunya. "Where there is a father there must be a mother."

That was logical enough, yet somehow it failed to satisfy John. He pondered for a while.

"I'll tell you what," resumed Dunya, "what was the name of Washington's wife?"

"Martha," replied John.

"Well then, you silly," said Dunya in conclusive tones, "if George Washington is the Father of His Country, then his wife, Martha, is the Mother of Her Country."

John was unsatisfied. He had been taught only that there was a Father of His Country. Nothing had been said to him about a mother. Besides, he hated to be bested in an argument. Suddenly a thought came to him, and he brightened up.

"No," he cried in triumph, "that can't be. For if George Washington is the Father of His Country, and his wife, Martha, the mother, then his brother and her brother would be the uncles of their country, his sister and her sister would be the aunts of their country, and the children of these aunts and uncles would be the cousins of their country, and so on. There would be no stopping anywhere. And so you see, this country had a father, but no mother. Well, who's the silly now?"

John gloated with pride at his unanswerable argument, and looked at his sister as if he awaited but expected no answer. And indeed all Dunya could say was:

"Ask your teacher to-morrow, and she will tell you that Martha was the mother of this country."

"She wasn't."

"She was."

This wrangling might have gone on indefinitely, had

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not their mother come in at that moment. John went on to the next sentence.

Bed time came. Gombarova picked up the lamp from the table, and everyone reluctantly left the stove and followed her into the next room. The room was large and dismally cold, it being a corner house, exposed on two sides. The slightly turned down flame of the lamp, placed on the table in the middle of the room, flickered gently as if caressed by timid slender gusts, causing apprehensive shadows to dance and waver in the corners and occasionally to sweep agitatedly across the walls and the ceiling in large frantic movements. The windows were luxuriant gardens of beautiful frost-flowers, which grew almost perceptibly and opened out and wafted their unfragrant iciness into the room. John pressed his nose against the window, and coming in contact with nettles of ice, withdrew quickly. He scraped away a small circle on the pane with his finger nails and looked out. The snow had ceased falling.

When he turned his face again, the large room, but poorly furnished with a few bare necessities, was in a confusion. Mattresses were being drawn out of a cupboard and flung on the floor against the walls. The Gombarovs no longer slept in beds.

Gombarova herself slept in the most sheltered corner, Sonyatchka's cradle being within reach of her hand. When Sonyatchka cried, Gombarova, her eyes closed, automatically put out her hand and rocked the cradle. Raya and Dunya slept together on one mattress, Katya and Absalom on another. John had a small mattress all to himself.

As soon as she saw all her children in their places Gombarova blew out the light and scurried over on her tip-toes to her corner across the cold carpetless floor. Sonyatchka gave a cry and the cradle began to rock. A

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low sleepy voice hummed a wordless lullaby. Elsewhere there were faint girlish whispers. The sound of rocking grew steadily lower, it seemed to lull the humming voice to sleep, the whispers ceased more abruptly. All that a little while ago lived, spoke and moved, now lapsed into mere breathing, deep, loud, long-drawn, now and then rising to hoarseness in the torturous effort to become a very young snore.

Night moved through the room on her noiseless feet and put her light dim fingers on weary heads. The Gombarovs slept.

Only John did not sleep. All curled up with cold, he lay there hardly dead, hardly alive. The cold air swept across the floor and tickled his nose. The chaos of his daylight life still whirled within him, gathered itself as it were into a ball of flame and settled where the heart was, only there was no longer any heart but a ball of flame. And this ball of flame, twirling, shot sparks to his brain, each spark a burning thought, a consuming fear. What was the use of it all? What was the object of life? Why had he come into the world? Was it only to suffer? He believed in God, a large man with a long flowing beard, but why was he so unkind to them, the Gombarovs? He lay there, hardly moving, hardly breathing, his large, wide-awake eyes fixed on the window, on the frost-flowers, made clear and luminous by the arc light outside. Why did they breathe so, these others, his mother and sisters? Their hard breathing alarmed him. Dunya muttered something just then, Raya gave a slight moan. Why couldn't people sleep quietly? John pulled the cover over his head. The ball of fire became like a stream, flowing between the head and the heart. This stream grew more and more sluggish, his thoughts grew more and more vague and confused, and at last weariness overcame him, he was asleep.

He had hardly closed his eyes than he woke as it were

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in another world. Much of what he had seen there he did not remember the next day, but he did remember entering a deep wood, swinging a long leafless birch, lopping off the heads of toadstools on either side of the little path. At last he came upon a large mushroom, and he had already lifted his birch in order to lop its head off, but paused quite suddenly: the mushroom was no longer a mushroom, but a small boy, very much like himself. Then—he did not remember exactly how it happened—he suddenly found himself running. He was being pursued by many small boys without heads. They were the toadstools whose heads he had lopped off. Though they were headless, and therefore blind, they pursued him unerringly, their arms stretched forward, fingers claw-like. At last he stumbled and fell on his knees, he wanted to cry out and could not utter the slightest sound. A hole seemed to open in the ground before him. He gave a scream and fell headlong into it.

He opened his eyes, and heard his mother's voice:

"What is the matter, Vanya, my darling? I'm here, my darling."

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CHAPTER IV

STEPFATHER GOMBAROV'S NEW VENTURE AND ADVENTURE

ONCE Gombarova settled with her flock of young ones in her new quarters on the top floor of an American tenement, small and wretched even beside the servants' quarters of the houses to which she had been accustomed, she began to take stock of her immediate resources, and finding that they were none too good after the expenses of the journey and later readjustment, began to look anxiously to her husband's arrival and wrote him many anxious letters to hasten it. As the days and the weeks passed, and Gombarov did not come, this anxiety increased. The few letters he sent contained ardent descriptions of new plans and vague promises about coming.

Gombarov's brother, Iakov Bogdanovitch, proved worse than useless. He started a small dyeing establishment in a basement a few doors away on Gombarova's money and favoured the Gombarovs with his presence at an occasional meal.

And with the coming of new troubled days Gombarova felt more and more the need of unburdening herself to someone. One day she told something of her troubles to the woman who lived on the floor below, a large good-natured soul, the wife of a tailor.

"Woe to Columbus," * she observed at the end of

* *"A klug zu Kolombussen"*—"Woe to Columbus"—is a common expression among Immigrant Jews in America, and is a sort of ironic imprecation upon the discoverer of America for their tribulations in the new country.

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Gombarova's story, "and it's even worse here than in Russia. One works from morning till night to make a bare living. But I'll tell you what you can do. Why don't you send out your boy to sell papers? My Harry will show him."

Gombarova hesitated a long time in taking this step, but at last, with many misgivings, she made up her mind to it. And that was how Vanya, three months short of eleven, found himself suddenly in after-school hours in the streets, doing a small but manly share to support the household.

Then came a long, anxious interval of weeks, during which Gombarova did not receive a word from her husband. This gave her much worry, and she was worried beside about Katya, who was taken ill just then. Katya was taken to the hospital, and Gombarova was permitted to see her on visiting days. During this time Gombarova had had many frantic moments. But one day a cablegram arrived from Gombarov, and she opened it with a trembling heart. It contained but one word:

"Free."

She did not know what to make of it. A partial explanation came about two weeks later, in a short note:

"Have been just released from prison. Will be with you again in a few days."

That very day she brought Katya back from the hospital. Katya was still very weak and a little yellow—the doctors said she had a mild form of jaundice, which was rather a rare illness, and so they were glad to have her. For the first time in weeks Gombarova was overwhelmingly happy. Indeed, it took but little to give her joy. She was more like a trembling young virgin awaiting her lover than a mother of several children. And in those few days she bore her burdens as if they were no heavier than a necklace of pearls.

Gombarov arrived toward the end of May. It was

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a sweltering day, almost like mid-summer, and he strode into the room attired in a linen suit, carrying a ponderously large leather bag which contained his personal luggage. He had not written on what ship he was coming, so that his entrance at the very moment that the Gombarovs were seated round the table at lunch took them all by surprise. After a protracted embrace of his wife, he embraced every one of the children separately, then in twos and in threes, gripping them so tightly that they cried with delight and pain. Gombarova gave John's chair to her husband, and gave John a box to sit on, there being no more chairs than there was need for in the Gombarov household. Gombarov talked as he ate.

"This is a barbarous place," was almost the first thing he said. "I no sooner passed the officials and got out of the immigrant station than I was attacked by a lot of young hooligans. I don't know what they imagined I was, perhaps a wild man from Africa. They made a noise and shouted all sorts of sounds at me, they surely couldn't have been words."

"Did they say 'B-zzzz'?" prompted Vanya.

"Yes, that was one of the things."

"That was at your beard," said Vanya, rather proud of his knowledge, "and did they say 'Sheeny'?"

"Yes, that's it, how clever you are, Vanya. What does 'Sheeny' mean?"

"That means Jew," answered Vanya, pleased at this proof afforded his mother of his own experience.

"So this is the free America, this is the City of Brotherly Love. We've run away from Sodom to come to Gomorrah. Well, I'm glad you've told me what these noises mean, Vanya, for I put my bag down for a moment and ran after one of those brats; he ran fast, but I ran faster. I caught him by his coat, then took hold of one of his donkey ears, and led him back to where my

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bag was. He struggled hard, but I managed to put him across my bended knee and gave him a drubbing that the young rascal won't forget soon. The other boys stood at some distance and jeered, but I went about my business. I wanted to give them a good reason for their jeering, and I did. I don't let anyone get the best of me."

Vanya was especially delighted with the experience related by Gombarov, and it gave him great joy to visualise the scene again and again. He felt that to some extent his stepfather had avenged his own persecution, from which he was not altogether free even now. Gombarova, on the other hand, looked worried, and at the end of her husband's narrative suggested quietly:

"I think, my dear, you'd better trim your beard a little, and get yourself a new suit."

She was far more eager to hear his own story, the story of the past few months, of his life in Russia, the reason of his going to prison, and other things of importance. After Raya, Dunya and Vanya had left for school, and she had tidied up the rooms, she broached the subject. He told her briefly of his experiences since his parting with her.

His first thought after his family's departure had been to settle the insurance affair, and once the money was in his pocket to rejoin his dear ones. But owing to the suspicious circumstances attendant upon the fire, the matter dragged along for weeks, and as he, Gombarov, was not a man to sit still with his hands folded, not if he tried, he bethought himself of something to do in the meantime. It occurred to him: why shouldn't he carry on his incidental experimental work before resuscitating his original project in America? He would show to himself and to others that no conflagration could consume his ardour, no deluge could drown his enthusiasm. After

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all, that fire was an accident, it was not likely to happen again. He bore no hatred toward Mendel, who, like a pearl or alloy, was a chemical accident. Perhaps the fire was even a good thing in its way, for after the first mood of listlessness into which it plunged him, after the first slight stoop it gave his back as he walked ground-gazing, a great rage seized him, waking all his energy, rousing his will and determination; he straightened himself, stood erect, there was neither sky nor ground for him, neither God nor devil, only himself and his creative fire within him. He would clear the old ruins, and build better in their place.

He rented half of a peasant's cottage in a village where he was not known; the other half was occupied by its owner, an old peasant woman. His share of the place consisted of a single, none too large room, with low ceiling, clay floor, white-washed walls, large brick oven on which you could sleep, and two small deep windows. He fitted up this room as a small laboratory, and took up his work where he had left off.

The villagers did not know what to make of the man, who so strangely shut himself in, and for whom mysterious small parcels kept on arriving almost every day. All sorts of rumours began to spread about him, and he became the talk of that and the neighbouring villages. One person passed the cottage at midnight, and happening to glance at the window saw an astonishing blue shooting flame, which made him cross himself three times; another person passed the house on another night, and glancing toward the window saw a purple flame falling apart in star-like sparks; he didn't stop to cross himself but ran on in the dark, pursued, it seemed to him, by the echoing footfalls of the cloven hoof; a third, bolder than the rest, actuated by a most fearful curiosity, almost not his own, ventured as far as the window —there was a fierce fire in the oven, and Gombarov, who

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stood with his back to the window, appeared to be working something with one foot, the fire gaining or losing in fierceness in the degree that the foot increased or slackened its action; from time to time he paused to throw small square-looking objects into strange-looking pots suspended on a metal bar over the curiously coloured fire. At one moment he took one of the pots and poured its contents into another, fire poured in "just like water"—at that instant Gombarov turned his perspiring face, looking fierce, tortured with the heat, lit up by the coloured flames, furrowed by sharp lines ascending as it were upward, eye-brows turned up at the outer corners—in short, the whole image gave the peeper the impression that he saw the devil in person. The peeper was so frightened by the apparition that he did not stop to look further, but fled precipitately, and only stopped to cross himself when he was safe in his own house.

Before long the report spread that Gombarov practised black magic, that he was Antichrist. Gombarov himself was oblivious of the excitement he caused. The landlady was appealed to, but as he appeared very human and very kind to her, and had besides paid her handsomely for a quarter in advance, she did not see what she could do. Of course, he might be a bit of a *znakhar* * in a benevolent way, that is a man who knew something and made use of his knowledge for good and not for bad. And she held to her opinion so strongly that the village became divided into two camps: there were those who believed Gombarov to be an evil sorcerer and Antichrist, and those who, seeing his face by daylight and being witness to his reasonable ways, scouted the conclusions of the midnight prowlers and were convinced that he was a man of great learning. This conviction was strengthened by the fact that latterly he had

* Wizard.

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called in his landlady once or twice to assist him in small operations which required a second hand. Surely, they thought, if he was the evil one, he would keep his affairs more dark. But the others held to their own and argued that the wiles of Satan were so great that they were not above simulating frankness and even kindness, in order the better to hide evil deeds.

This conflict about Gombarov might have gone on indefinitely, had not a new arrival from St. Petersburg upset the calculation of both camps and threw them into a new turmoil. This arrival was Arkhip Petrovitch, a native of the village who served as house porter for a retired general in Peter* and had received a few days' leave to see his mother. Owing to his life in Peter, Arkhip was regarded highly, even with awe, by the villagers, and as his opinion was held to be of value, he was not long in hearing both sides about Gombarov. When they came to the point in the narrative about mysterious parcels, the curious blue and purple flames and the pots of liquid fire Arkhip's face suddenly brightened up, a gleam of intelligence leapt to his eyes, he smiled the smile of one who was superior to his fellows and twirled his moustaches in a way that left no doubt that he had a clue to the mystery. He showed his good training, gained at the point of the general's boot, by not interrupting, but he kept up his tantalising smile and twirled his moustaches with gingerly assurance. When the speaker concluded, Arkhip made an impressive face, but withheld his pronouncement for some moments. He appeared to enjoy the looks of anticipation he had provoked in the villagers' faces and prolonged the suspense in order to heighten the effect of the thunderbolt he was about to throw.

"Well, well," he drawled at last, "you are a lot of country bumpkins; you can't see further than your nose;

* Short for St. Petersburg.

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may the Lord have mercy on your souls! Not that it's for me to judge you, seeing as you haven't lived in Peter, and haven't seen the things as I have seen. Why, brother, such things do happen as would make your hair stand on end, and it's a wise man as would be able to tell the difference between himself and a porcupine. Of course, how should you know? The potatoes have got to be hoed, the corn has got to be threshed, the hay mowed. These things has got to be done, and you are here to do it. If everybody was to go to Peter what would become of our *matushka** Russia. And so mind you, I'm not blaming you, for not seeing through this Jew fellow. They are a sleek lot, these Jews. And it's all clear as daylight to me, what he is and what's he come down here for to work on the quiet. I haven't been all these years in Peter for nothing, and it's rather lucky for you I've come when I did. Let me tell you then, you've got a dangerous man among you, and you don't know it. The idea of taking this Jew for a sorcerer! That would make my master, the general, laugh. Well, I'll tell you what he's up to. He's one of those Nihilist fellows, and he's making bombs to blow up some one or other, you can't tell, maybe some governor, some general, maybe the *batushka*** Tsar himself."

Then Arkhip paused and watched the faces of his listeners to see what effect his own bomb had on them. He twirled his moustaches more vigorously than ever, twisting them upward into sharp points. His hearers were indeed startled, and it was clear that their hitherto divided opinions melted and merged credulously before the fierce assurance of the newcomer. They raised a tumult of indignation, and Arkhip, who had watched his master, the general, to some good purpose, lifted his hand for silence, whereat the villagers became quiet.

* Little mother.
** Little father.

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"Now don't make a fuss about it," began Arkhip, "these Nihilists are very slippery fellows, especially when they are Jews. Once they smell a rat they are the very devil for slipping through your fingers. You'd think they had an invisible cap and go off in the air somewhere. Now you see them, now you don't. Leave it to me. Don't let on you know anything. We'll catch him like a rat in a trap. Silence, not a word—as the general says."

On the following day a cordon of police surrounded Gombarov's place. Answering the knock, Gombarov opened the door, and found himself confronted by a sergeant with dangling sabre, flanked on either side by a soldier with fixed bayonet. Being slightly near-sighted, dazzled by the light, Gombarov with screwed up eyes leant forward toward the sergeant. He looked puzzled rather than afraid.

"We have come to search your place," said the sergeant.

"Ah, I see, someone has been carrying tales about me," remarked Gombarov.

Gombarov himself was searched first of all, and all the letters and the papers in his pockets seized. Then they began to search among his books, Gombarov helping. In a very adroit way he managed to slip a little paper-covered book into his pocket. It was entitled "The Iron Age," and Gombarov had received it in answer to an advertisement which described it as a book dealing with certain technical matters but which when it came turned out to be a revolutionary pamphlet.

They found nothing. That is, they found no incriminating books or papers, nor bombs. But the chemicals looked suspicious, like most things one doesn't know anything about.

"You'd better come along with us," said the sergeant to Gombarov at the end of the search.

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To Gombarov's protest, the sergeant replied:

"I'm sorry, but that's our orders. I have a warrant for your arrest."

And he drew out of his pocket an official paper with a red seal.

The sergeant locked the door and gave orders for the room not to be disturbed. Gombarov marched down the village street between six soldiers with fixed bayonets. He walked calmly, addressing a remark now and then to the sergeant, who replied politely. Again evil, triumphant in men's hearts, looked out of multiple eyes, with satisfaction and malice. But good, mystified, turned away in pity, and closing its eyes, prayed on bent knees before the dimly lit-up image. For Gombarov had been kind to some of them in their need, had cured their babies for them with mysterious medicines. Arkhip and his comrades, watching the gleaming bayonets disappear, station-wards, over the crest of the hill, turned their footsteps toward the public house, splitting the clear, sun-lit air with uproarious guffaws.

Once in his cell, Gombarov thought of the little book in his pocket and of the best way he could dispose of it. He examined his cell. He decided it was too risky to toss the book through the barred window into the courtyard. There was a flue high up in the wall, and he could just manage to reach its grating by standing up on the cot. First of all, he tore the pamphlet into tiny bits, then having made sure by putting his ear to the door that there was no guard within hearing he stood up on the cot and by stretching out his arm to the uttermost he just managed to reach the grating. Through infinite patience and no little physical exertion, he rid himself of his contraband, scrap by scrap, rolled into little tubes to get them through the very small openings. The whole operation took about twenty minutes, and at the end of it he felt easier.

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He had no sooner finished his arduous task than he heard footsteps in the corridor, the rhythmical clink of spurs. They paused before his door, which opened quietly. Two gendarmes entered, they asked Gombarov to follow them.

Down the dimly-lit corridor he walked between the gendarmes, turning corners, and more corners, astonished at the hive-like maze of passages and cross-passages, at the maddening continuity of doors and the monotonous interludes between doors, the gendarmes' spurs clinking steadily and evenly, so many clinks between one door and another, clink, clink, clink, past doors interminable in number, an infinity of doors, each leading into a cul-de-sac of human wretchedness as into a honeyless bee-cell holding a writhing bee shut in from flowers.

Then they crossed a closed-in, tunnel-like bridge into another building, and walking up a stairway found themselves in an area-way, hexagonal in shape, each section of which had a door. One of the gendarmes pushing open one of the doors, they came upon a small spiral staircase, leading downward and upward. One gendarme led the way down, followed by Gombarov, the other went behind. They had got down but part way before they paused on a small landing, which led into a small but very deep door suggesting the entrance to a vault. The door opened noiselessly, as of itself, and Gombarov was astonished to find himself in a large brilliantly lighted room. This onslaught of light dazzled him, for a moment he saw nothing. When he looked to either side of him the gendarmes were no longer there, they had departed silently. All at once he became aware of a presence, rather large and official, and on hearing this presence call his name, he walked in its direction, groping through the light. The official's shape, shining at its summit, loomed before Gombarov's dazzled near-sighted eyes like a mountain in a sun-drenched mist. Gombarov

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laughed to himself as he realised the childish obviousness of all these preliminaries, and he was determined that he would neither be confused nor unnerved. He was an experienced bird in his own way, and they weren't going to put any salt on his tail. Not if he could help it. He braced himself, walked erect toward the official, and betrayed not the least sign of fear.

"Be seated, please," said the official, who appeared to be an important personage, if one were to judge from his imperious manners and numerous decorations.

But Gombarov did not flinch. Not for an instant. He sat down with a dignified ease, which must have astonished the general, for Gombarov had made up his mind that this official was nothing short of a general. He sat down and waited, not like a man about to be cross-examined, but like one who awaited an explanation.

The official asked the usual questions: his full name, when and where was he born, what was his father's occupation, on what date did he marry, how many children had he, what made him take up chemistry, and all the rest of the official rigmarole.

Gombarov suddenly became aware of another presence, a younger man, taking down his answers, which were simple and direct and uttered without hesitation. It was when they came to more recent events that the official's manner became sharp and scrutinising.

"What I don't understand is, why you are here and your family is in America," he said sharply.

"That's very simple," replied Gombarov, "I was waiting for my insurance money."

"You Jews are always waiting for your insurance money."

"Your Excellency," observed Gombarov quite boldly, "surely a man can't be a mercenary and a revolutionary at the same time. I may be one or the other, but I can't be both. Miserliness and recklessness are not brothers."

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"Never mind that," said the official. "What I want to know is, did you get your money?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"About two months ago."

"M-mmm . . . two months ago . . . why didn't you clear out then?"

"I had begun some experiments, and as I was on the point of making a discovery, I thought I had better go on with them."

"What is your discovery?"

"It has to do with metals."

"M-mm . . . metals . . ." There was irony in the official's voice. He seemed lost in thought for a minute or two. He leant forward toward Gombarov, and said almost persuasively:

"Now, you tell us who your accomplices are and we will let you off scot free, provided you go to America at once. This is worth taking into consideration, I assure you."

"I am not a criminal, and therefore have no accomplices," said Gombarov in a hard voice, on the verge of anger.

"You'd better think it over," said the official, "we'll get at the truth in any case."

"I am not afraid of the truth," shouted Gombarov almost into the official's face.

The official pressed a button at the side of his desk. There was a clink of spurs outside the door. The door opened silently. Two gendarmes entered. They were not the same who had conducted him before. One walking in front, the other bringing up the rear, Gombarov keeping in step between them found himself at last in his cell.

The news of Gombarov's arrest caused excitement in the whole province. The newspapers printed accounts of it and of the circumstances of the whole case, which they

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regarded as extremely suspicious. They dwelt especially upon his life in the village and the feeling of unrest he had created among the peasants. What they did not dwell upon was the nature of this unrest. Altogether he was regarded as a very important capture. The case was even reported in the metropolitan newspapers, gaining in glamour with every mile that it went beyond its own immediate scene.

The trial opened, with the court room crowded with men from many provinces, some of them quite distant, so eager were they to see "the little Polish Jew" about whom such strange reports circulated. Carriage after carriage stopped at the approach to the court house, unloading its occupants, men in epaulettes and gold braid, and women in Parisian gowns.

Gombarov was calm, dignified, fearless. He had nothing to fear but injustice. His alert mind was a blade of Sheffield steel, a sharp active rapier, which first of all, with a few agile thrusts, ripped away the gold braid, the epaulettes, the imperious voices, and all the official tinsel of his adversaries; with an effort of his will he stripped them, reduced them to minds, naked, without extraneous defence, and he pitted his mind against theirs. He was David, they were Goliath. He refused all counsel, he would make his own defence. What had he to be afraid of, after all? Why, there were two or three "bench-warmers" he had known and measured swords with in his early days in the synagogue, and any one of them, measuring mind against mind, could put a general into his pocket, gold braid and all. Standing in the prisoner's docket, his mind arrogantly advanced to meet theirs. Firm on his feet, the muscles of his legs strained to tension, his shoulders sturdily erect, his plentiful black hair bristling, his defiant eyes shot out as from a sling luminous gleams of challenge.

The prosecution saw the challenge, wanted to break

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him, made an effort to break him. The impudent little Jew. They fired all sorts of questions at him with great rapidity, they took turns in trying to confuse him, to put him out of countenance by veiled insults, to reduce his fearless mind to a quivering atom of dull fear in the bewildering chaos of their own brilliance. He parried the poisoned arrows, he fired his defiant answers clearly and quickly, he sometimes answered question with question in Oriental fashion, introducing now and then to their confusion a parable, and he made them fume when he took the edge off the question by asking in bland, collected tones:

"Will you be good enough to repeat the question?"

The audience gazed fascinated at the devilish little man, who stood there so tense and electric, emitting sparks in abundance, reaching all hearts. They had come, full of anticipation, to see him flayed, to see him stripped of the proverbial pound of flesh, taken from his very heart, if a Jew can have a heart so large, but there he was, very much whole and sound, his mind erect like a wall between his heart and those who would flay it. Indeed, there were keen moments when it seemed to all that he was the flayer and they the flayed, he the judge and they the judged.

"*Molodtchina*—a clever chap!" whispered one grand dame to her gold-adorned escort. She was studying the face of the little Polish Jew through a lorgnette.

Others were pleased because they had a personal grudge against one or more of the prosecuting officials and would have a topic of conversation for some days to come.

Gombarov had reduced his case to one of chemicals. Were his chemicals of the sort used in the making of explosives? Yes, some of them were. But others were not. The *procureur-general* picked up a small bottle

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containing a dull silvery fluid from a table upon which was an exhibit of Gombarov's chemicals.

"What's this?" he asked Gombarov.

"That? It took me months to prepare that. I cannot tell you without giving away a secret that others would take advantage of."

"But it is important that we should know."

"You have your own experts," retorted Gombarov.

An expert, on being called, admitted that he had made an examination of the liquid, but that the nature of certain of its properties had wholly eluded him. This statement coming from a government expert caused a commotion in the court room. Gombarov stood there, apparently indifferent to it all. He concealed the satisfaction he felt.

The *procureur-general* turned to Gombarov.

"Never fear, we will get at the truth."

That awoke Gombarov from his momentary callousness. Something from the deepest depths of him gathered to his face in a fierce cloud, torturous for an instant round the temples, then moving, relentless, very fierce, breaking in a storm, sudden, unlooked-for; his sturdy frame shook, his voice, not his own, was a lightning, shrill and electric and very fierce; it withered the room into a fierce silence, all were very silent and still, only their spines felt a faint tremor vibrating downwards, magnetically; his shrill, fierce cry vibrated down their spines like the cry of Sarah Bernhardt in Tosca.

"I am not afraid of the truth. I have pursued truth all my life!" cried Gombarov shrilly and fiercely.

The fashionable audience forgot that they had come to laugh at a little Polish Jew, that they had come to see him flayed, flayed pitilessly. Pitiless and shrill was his cry, and it flayed them pitilessly. They had come ribald and expectant to see a Jew devil, a Shylock, a variation on Shylock. And he flouted them pitilessly. But they

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enjoyed their flouting, because they thought they were seeing a play, Sarah Bernhardt in Tosca. They applauded. It was as if some spirit outside themselves, entering their bodies at that moment, moved their hands to applaud, though he had flouted them pitilessly. An official rapped for silence, and reprimanded Gombarov for his outburst. The case was continued. Witnesses were called. Professor Malinov spoke of Gombarov's scientific genius.

Gombarov was acquitted. Many came forward to congratulate him, among them the formidable official, the first to cross-examine him in gaol. He slipped a card into Gombarov's hand and whispered: "At your service." He slipped it nonchalantly into his pocket. Later, in a leisure moment, he came upon it, but was not astonished to read the name of General Lenitsky, a celebrated official, very clever, very much feared, a price on his head.

Gombarov returned to the village five days later. He found many letters and telegrams waiting for him. Among these were four or five invitations to dinner from baronesses and generals' wives. He also found a delegation of peasants lodged at the inn, waiting for him to appear. They were all crippled, or maimed or blind, and on the day of his return, he opened the door in response to a knock, and he found them waiting for him, a dozen of them or so. They came to be healed by him. One wanted a leg straightened, that he might walk without a crutch; another, who went off into terrible fits of coughing, wanted his asthma cured; a third, with cataracts in his eyes, wanted his sight restored so that he might see the black and green of the earth and the blue of the skies; a fourth had his sight, but owing to a curvature of spine and curious malformation of the neck could only see the ground he walked on and the food on his plate and the little children who looked up at him curi-

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ously and the small domestic animals and the fowl which fluttered their wings helplessly as they ran from him in alarm; eloquently and pitifully he cried to Gombarov that he was tired and weary of looking always, always upon the greyness of the earth and the tomb-stones of dead men and upon crawling things, the worm and the snake, and oh how he wanted to see the great stretching horizon and the sun at midday and tree tops in the wind and the rainbow after the storm and all the soaring things up on high, the crow, the hawk and the eagle. He was like a man who walked for ever and ever in a low-roofed cellar, through the open door of which crept in a gleam of the sun, and the shadow of some one walking past, and the cry of a bird, always the lights and the shadows and the reflection of things, never a sight of the things themselves. Eloquently and pitifully he cried to Gombarov to heal him. He had fifty roubles in the knot of his handkerchief, he would give it to him gladly, and if that was not enough he would sell his house, he would give him everything, everything, if he would only heal him, if he would only straighten him, make him see with ease that which he now saw with such effort. Eloquently and pitifully he pleaded to him. A fifth man was about to speak, a man who had seemed powerful once but was now eaten away by some wasting disease. Having recovered from his astonishment and grasped the situation, Gombarov raised an interposing hand and said:

"I am sorry, *rebyata,** I wish I could help you. I am afraid someone has been lying to you. I am not a healer."

The unhappy ones were incredulous, they pleaded with him, but at last departed. Gombarov stood in the doorway a long time and watched the strange company, mostly on crutches, limping away slowly and dejec-

* Children.

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tedly, murmuring their disappointment among themselves. He wanted to laugh. No, not at their misfortunes. But at that credulity which first made a devil of him, and now, after his triumph, a Christ. He went back to his room and laughed at this turn in affairs. If he were a charlatan he could have made a lot of money. That adventure was not the last, for still they came, the credulous, from more and more distant parts, the blind, the crippled, the unhappy. Pitifully they cried to him, and sometimes eloquently. And always they limped away, that strange company of unfortunates, slowly and dejectedly. Only when some poor mother of the neighbourhood came, bringing her babe suffering with colic, she found Gombarov ever ready to respond with advice and medicine.

This excitement attendant upon Gombarov after his trial had not wholly subsided when he took his departure for America. And to the last moment detectives prowled in the neighbourhood, for he was still under the surveillance of the police. Indeed, there were two or three officials who had helped to conduct the trial who were hard persuaded to believe that a man could arouse sufficient suspicion to be arrested and yet be innocent.

Gombarova laughed and cried as she listened to her husband's narrative. She was proud of him, and trembled at his danger. She clung to him at the thought of it, as though he had not yet escaped it. And cleaving to him a long time, she at last released her hold of him. And she sat near him a long time, delighted with the mere looking at him. Then to break the long silence she asked him in a casual way:

"What do you intend doing now?"

As if he had expected her question, he put his hand into his pocket and drew something out, wrapped in tis-

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sue paper, which he unfolded, and revealed a piece of yellow metal, cylindrical in shape, rough and greyish about its roundness, polished and golden at its ends. He put one end to his mouth, and blew his breath on it, then rubbed his handkerchief across it. Golden now, and luminous like a mirror, he held it up to her.

"It's a little present I've brought for America. It looks as good as gold, doesn't it? Well, it is as good as gold, and it can be made as cheap as plated silver or brass. I intend to make knives and spoons of it, the fine thing about it is that it won't tarnish, and with a little trouble it will always look as fine as gold, so that it will be even within the reach of the poor to be 'born with a golden spoon in one's mouth.' Just look at it! Why, it's good enough for a wedding ring."

He was quite lost in admiration of his achievement; the gleam of his eyes answered the gleam of the metal; his eyes were fixed on the metal as on the eyes of a beloved.

Gombarova saw the gleam of his eyes answering the gleam of the metal, and her heart retreated from its glad radiance into utter darkness. Her heart was a black planet, gliding slowly and painfully through a mass of black, unutterably black cloud, pressing upon it, slowly and painfully. A black fog enveloped her; a black fog was this fear of the future, in a black fog of the great unknown she sought her little ones, her sweet satellites.

What a sickening thing, what a blight, what a plague upon life, worse than the Egyptian darkness, was this black fear, this unutterable fear, dispersing the rays of the sun, obliterating gladness and light, frightening away hopes one has fed crumbs to as to glad white birds on the window-sill of one's consciousness, frightening away, scattering, setting on wing one's hopes in bird-like, flock-like terror.

But Gombarov did not notice her mood. He was quite

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lost in admiration of his achievement, the gleam of his eyes answered the gleam of the metal, his eyes were fixed on the metal as on the eyes of a beloved. He repeated:

"It's good enough for a wedding ring."

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CHAPTER V

JOHN LEARNS THAT A GOOD COIN RINGS TRUE AND THAT A GOOD CIGAR HAS A WHITE ASH

THE arrival of Gombarov brought no radical change in the household. Life went on as before. Gombarova and Raya and Dunya toiled at home; John, after school hours, went out to sell papers. And in spite of all his efforts, he remained a marked lad: boys frightened him, and older men winked at each other on seeing him. But there are always eccentric people in this world; there were some eccentric enough to treat John with exceeding kindness. And once or twice he felt that this kindness was not for the world, but was meant for him personally. He had customers who always sought him out, and refused to buy of other boys.

"Ah, my boy, I've been looking for you everywhere," cried a nice gentleman, who had come out of the door of a neighbouring hotel, though there was a very prosperous news-stall in the hotel itself. And he gave him five cents for a two-cent paper. He did this day after day.

And again one day, a gentleman, kindly-eyed and white-bearded, walked on some distance after being accosted by John, but turned back and stopped in front of the boy, the very image of a kindly father. The rays of his benignity fell upon John, who smiled, without knowing why. The old gentleman, regarding John for some time, at last drawled in a voice which reminded one of a thaw:

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"Sonny, what papers have you?"

Well, that was a strange question. Did the old man then topple down from the sky, from his golden seat at the right hand of God the kindly father; or did he come on a ferry-boat, across the river, from Camden, where, John had been told, there lived in huddled, ugly little houses, a race of men, many of whom had never beheld Chestnut Street, the magnificent? Quickly recovering himself, John named the papers, five in number, in his accustomed order, which merged the discordant sounds and made for euphony. The old man laughed:

"Sonny, you said it as if it were all the name of one paper. Now which one do you recommend?"

John scrutinised the old man and thought that he was prosperous. He replied:

"It depends. Rich men usually buy the *Bulletin*. It's a three-cent paper."

The old man chuckled.

"And what paper do the poor men buy?" he asked.

"Well, if you are poor enough, you buy the *Item*. I sell more *Items* than anything else."

"Sonny, you'd better give me both. You see, I'm both rich and poor."

The old man pulled out his purse and extracted a dime, and as he took his papers he said:

"Sonny, you may keep the change."

John watched the old man go, and much to his surprise he saw him hand over the papers to another newsboy a little farther on. He pondered: what did the old man mean by saying he was both rich and poor? How could a man be one and the other at the same time? And even while he pondered over his problem, which was to have its illumination for him many years afterwards, a strange boy, in tattered clothing, walked up to him, and said rather nonchalantly:

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"A funny old duffer that's just bought the paper off o' you, wasn't he?"

John did not reply at once to the boy's question. He felt hurt at the old man being called a duffer. At last he said:

"All I can say is, I wish there was more duffers like that, as you call 'em. He gave me a dime."

"Don't take it kind of personal, kid," said the boy. "A man may be a funny old duffer and still be a funny old bloke. Now when we calls a man a bloke or a duffer we don't mean anything by it—not that some old fellows ain't blokes and duffers—it's just our manner of speaking. One can see you ain't been in this village long."

"No, I haven't," replied John, astonished that a boy of that type should talk to him softly.

"Well, have you had good luck to-day?" asked the boy half indifferently.

"Not bad."

John jingled the coins in the side pocket of his breeches.

The two boys got quite chummy and were talking on divers topics for some time, when suddenly the boy in the tattered suit asked:

"Do you take exercises?"

"Exercises?" repeated John, for a moment puzzled.

"Yes, the monkey tricks to make you strong," and the ragamuffin suited the action to the word by beginning to perform strange antics with his arms and legs, working them outwardly and inwardly, in a series of sharp angles, now getting down in a sitting posture, now rising erect, quite like a puppet on a string.

"You do dese here monkey tricks every day, and you'll get strong," resumed the boy as he looked at John's rather slight form.

"I am strong," said John defensively, wary at heart of the boy's intentions.

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"I'll tell you what we'll do," suggested the boy, "let us see who can lift each other easier from the hips. You try first."

John put his hands on the boy's hips and lifted him from the ground, then put him down.

"Well, you're stronger than I thought," said the boy, "but I can hold you up longer."

He, in his turn, put his hands on John's hips, lifted him, and held him up quite a long time. Then he put him down slowly.

"You see, I'm stronger. That's what comes of doing monkey tricks every day. I advise you do the same. But I must be going now. See you later. Ta, ta!" And the ragamuffin walked away slowly, his hands in his pockets.

If John was astonished at the boy chumming up with him, he was even more astonished at himself being able to chum up with the boy; the feeling was one of elation. Barely had the boy gone a few steps than John put a hand into his pocket in order to jingle the money there, for it comforted him to know that it was a good day for him. He no sooner put his hand into his pocket than a pang of distress shot through him, and his face grew pale. His money was gone. He realised at once what had happened, that the boy, lifting him at the hips, had managed very adroitly to slip his hands into his pockets and extract therefrom all their contents. He ran after the boy, who was still walking rather leisurely, and catching up with him, clutched him hard by the sleeve.

"I want my money," said John, panting.

"What money?" asked the boy nonchalantly.

"The money . . . the money you t-took out of my pocket when you lifted me . . ."

"Stop yer kiddin'," said the boy, assuming a surprised look. "I ain't got your money."

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"What's that?" exclaimed John, suddenly feeling the boy's pocket with his free hand. "Look here, you'd better hand it over; there comes a policeman, and I'll tell him."

The boy put a hand into his pocket and drew out a handful of coins.

"That's not all," said John, taking the money. "I want the rest of it."

"That's all I've got," said the boy sullenly.

"I had two dimes and a nickel that are not here," said John. "You'd better give them to me."

The boy thrust his hand once more into his pocket and handed John the missing coins. John released his hold of the boy and walked back to his corner. He trembled all over and his knees shook, but his heart was glad at his narrow escape. What would they say at home if he were to come back without his money? He would be called a *Schlemil.* Yes, and worse than that, he would see himself a Schlemil in his own eyes. He breathed heavily at the thought of his narrow escape. And for a long time he stood there lost in thought.

"Pay-per-rs!" he suddenly cried automatically, from sheer habit, for he had no intention at all of raising his cry.

As if in response to his cry, a tall, automaton-like man, walking with a broad, automatic stride, paused all at once in front of John as if his mechanism had quite suddenly gone out of order. John was startled out of his thoughts.

"Boy, I want a *Star.* And give me my change quick. I must catch a train." And at the same instant he thrust a quarter into John's hand.

John gave the man his paper and quickly counted out two dimes and four cents, and gave them to the man. The man took his paper, pocketed the money, and resumed his angular stride. For some moments his bowler

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hat and two sharp ends of moustaches seen from behind continued to bob up and down above the heads of other people, until they disappeared round the corner. John jingled the coins in his pocket, but this jingling had nothing to do with his thoughts, which were elsewhere. His head was quite detached from the rest of his body. The cry "Pay-per-rs!" came from his throat at intervals, but this too had nothing to do with him.

Then, suddenly, his hand, for perhaps the twentieth time, hit upon the quarter he had just received, and it struck him that it might be well to get change for it, in readiness for a chance customer with a large coin. And so still jingling his coins, he walked a short way down the street and turned into a tobacconist's shop, a small cell-like place, formerly a side entrance to the large hotel of which it was a part. The tobacconist, a little man with *embonpoint,* stood leaning against his show-case, his legs crossed, his thumbs in the sleeveless holes of his waist-coat, a cigar in his mouth, the ash from which, falling, grazed the outermost line of his middle, and being a white ash it lay there an eloquent witness to the quality of the cigar.

"Well, sonny, what can I do for you?" he asked, beaming good-naturedly upon the boy, as he took up his place behind the show-case.

John barely peeped with his eyes across the high show-case, and put down his quarter on the round piece of rubber with projecting points for the reception of coins. "Please let me have some change," he said.

The little man picked up the coin, and his face could not have undergone a more drastic change if he had picked up a live snake. The many little smiling lines wriggled downward to make up a frown.

"My boy," he said at last, "you know you can get pinched for shoving the queer."*

* *Shoving the queer:* passing counterfeit money.

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John grew pale.

"What do you m-mean?" he asked in a faltering voice.

"Now don't act the innocent, you know it's a bad quarter."

"I really didn't know," John defended himself. "A man just gave it to me, and I gave him twenty-four cents change."

"Well, all I can say is that you've been done. Do you see the difference?"—the little man pulled out a quarter out of his cash drawer, and flung it down on the floor. "Hear how it rings! Now watch the other." And he flung down the bad coin in the same way. It gave forth a dull sound. Then he thought he ought to moralise a little: "It's the same with men. Some men ring good and true, some men are counterfeit, they look all right, but are made of lead. Now look at me"—John thought he was made of fat and wouldn't ring at all if flung down on the floor—"I haven't made a dishonest penny in my life. It's true, I'm not rich, but I'm as good as anybody. In fact, a good man is like a good cigar. The best cigar in the world is worth so much. If you wanted to pay more you couldn't get a better one. And you can always tell a good cigar by its smell and its white ash."

John pondered on this for a few moments. Then he asked:

"But how can you tell a good man from a bad one —that he won't stick his hand in your pocket or give you a bad coin?"

This seemed to make the man angry.

"How can you tell?" he exclaimed in a rasping voice. "Keep your two lamps wide open, young man, and you'll know quick enough. What were your two eyes given you for?"

John did not know. The boy who put his hands in John's pockets had also two eyes, the man who gave him

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the lead quarter had the same number. How did these two use their eyes? Those two kept them wide open in order to cheat him, John Gombarov. Did it follow then that if he, John Gombarov, kept his eyes wide open he could cheat some one else?

John picked up his lead quarter from the rubber disc and slunk out of the shop, a whipped dog, with his tail between his legs.

Of course not!—he went on to the conclusion, as he resumed his place on his corner—he must keep his eyes wide open merely to keep cheats from him, merely to keep them from sticking their hands into his pockets, or giving him lead quarters. Must he then suspect everyone? Must he then keep his hand on his pocket, ring every coin he received from a customer? Life was becoming a great problem.

He was about to cry automatically his cry, but it died in his throat, for his hand at that moment fell upon that lead quarter in his pocket. What was he to do with it? Was he to try to pass it on some one else? That quarter represented more than half his earnings for the afternoon. He was again about to cry automatically his cry, but once more it died in his throat. There was no cry left in him.

He absently watched the people go by, and he thought: If he could only turn them into coins, or into cigars! Then he would ring them to see whether they were good or bad, or he would take a puff at them to see whether they had a white or a black ash. But then this last might make him sick, for he had not yet learned to smoke, and God alone knew how many cigars he might find with the black ash.

The cry he was about to cry died in his throat.

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CHAPTER VI

AN ENTRANCE AND AN EXIT—THE CLASH OF TWO WILLS, A THIRD INTERVENING

It was not many weeks before stepfather Gombarov installed himself in a workshop at the top of a four-story house in Arch street. This building had an advantage for him in that he could get so much horse power from the machine-shop below.

Small pieces of machinery kept on arriving for him from Russia, the experimental remainders from his village laboratory, the place of his late adventure. He had begun to buy the larger pieces, as far as he could get them, in Philadelphia. But there were many small pieces unobtainable here, and he had to send for these to Germany. His small capital began to dwindle alarmingly.

All this took weeks and weeks, looking backward you counted the months. Gombarov's one great drawback was his ignorance of the language. It was true that he managed to read an English technical book, but every-day speech was beyond him. Occasionally he found his German useful in dealing with American firms, but at other times he was obliged to have recourse to an interpreter, and as he was in his oriental, discursive way a sociable man, he sometimes picked up in the Jewish community, in which his genius found admirers, a young man willing to offer his services as interpreter. But strange man that he was, his acquaintance extended into the most curious quarters, and the tenement in which the

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Gombarov family dwelt was astonished by the frequent visits of a German Lutheran pastor, which, however, did not hinder a devout Jew, even one with side locks, from crossing the Gombarov threshold. No one who knew Gombarov worried about the matter, but there were some who feared lest the pastor become a Jew, for the Jews do not like proselytes. But there was no danger of one or the other happening. It is true, Gombarov was known as a sceptic, but he was a sceptic within his faith, not outside of it; he acknowledged in his own way the lordship of Adonai, whose face is not to be seen by a mortal, and whose name Jehovah, though written, is never uttered by pious Jews; yet he took a delight when the chance offered to prove his God in the wrong. For he was an intellectual sceptic, not an emotional one, and his God loved a jest and an argument. He held forth in this vein before Jews only; before Gentiles he stood up for God as one might for one's own beloved father, who in his great love and wisdom could not make a mistake or do a wrong. But he feared the German pastor's faith so little that he did not hesitate to send his own eldest child, Katya, now seven, to the school attached to the Reverend Schultz's church, in order that she might learn German. The little girl would come home and recite her ten commandments in German, and sometimes a sentence with the words, *Iesu Christi* and *Heilige Geist,* which brought a smile to her father's face. This evoked a vigorous remonstrance from Gombarov's brother, Iakov, who still kept his small dyeing establishment a few doors away. One day when Iakov spoke with greater warmth than usual, Gombarov seized the child by the sleeve, and asked Iakov:

"Didn't you once dye that blouse blue?"

Iakov looked rather guilty.

"Well, you know you did," went on Gombarov. "And it's almost grey again. One more wash and it will be

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as it was before. That shows that the original dye is stronger than the one put on. You ought to know our Gombarov blood. Anything that touches us can only touch us like your miserable dyes. I want my little girl to know German, and when all is said and done, that is the only thing that will stick to her—or you don't know the Gombarovs."

At that moment there was a knock. Pastor Schultz came in. Iakov went out. Pastor Schultz stayed nearly two hours and talked science with his host over tall tumblers of Russian tea with lemon. He promised to go with Gombarov next day to help him buy parts of mechanism, to be his English interpreter.

A few days later Gombarov's faith in the Gombarov blood was somewhat shaken by the appearance of a stranger on the threshold, a big brawny man of about twenty-eight, healthily ruddy in complexion, very clean-shaven except for a full-grown moustache, big-shouldered, big-fisted, sturdy-legged, yet constructed altogether rather loosely, like one who got his muscle not by Swedish drill or college games but by heavy outdoor work. The slight bagginess of his garments added to, rather than detracted from, the sense of his graceful, animal-like strength. When Gombarova opened the door to him her first impulse was to tell him in her broken English that he had found the wrong door, but her second thought upon hearing him pronounce Gombarov's name was that he was another one of those Russian spies, who from time to time still pestered Gombarov, even at such a distance from the place of his last Russian adventure. But much to the surprise of all he turned out to be Gombarov's own brother, Israel, or Sroolik—as he was known at home, from which he ran away as a boy and went to America to see life and to make his fortune.

Everyone was overjoyed at seeing him, outwardly be-

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cause he was a kinsman, but deep down because of the sense of adventure he brought to all.

"Mr. Gombarov, do sit down and have supper with us," said Gombarova, "the girls are getting it ready."

"Gladly," replied the newly-found kinsman. "But really Mrs. Gombarov, I must tell you that for practical purposes I've changed my name. I am no longer Israel Bogdanovitch Gombarov, but simply Sam Carney. I know it must appear funny to you, but I had to do it."

And over the supper table he told his story in a few words.

He came to America at seventeen. He had a few dollars left and knew a little mechanics. But as he did not know the language the last was of no good to him. He invested a part of his small fund in a pedlar's pack, and walked about with it in the streets of New York. He managed to make a bare living, earning more insults than pennies. He went to night school and learnt a little English. In the street he learnt that it was an evil thing to be a Jew, in America as elsewhere. He learnt yet another thing. To be a Jew was not so much to have a religion as an occupation. The Jews who were agriculturists in ancient Judea were one race. The modern Jews who were bankers, tradesmen and pedlars were another. This new race was for the most part a product of suggestion. Unconsciously, through a thousand and one hints, it has tried to live up to the Gentiles' idea of it. The Jew in life had become an actor, playing the rôle of the stage Jew. And as one could commonly tell a blacksmith, a farmer, a professional actor, a clerk, an artist, a navvy, a detective, a crook, so one might also tell a Jew by his occupation of "Jewishness" which his neighbours have forced upon him.

At least, that was how life appeared to him, Sroolik, as he walked the streets of New York, a dark, curly-haired lad with his pedlar's pack. He knew what it was

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to be a Jew pedlar, the object of ridicule and reviling. He knew well that sense of shrinking within oneself under these unprovoked assaults, that sense of rage and seething hidden under his smiling mask; and one day he felt the presence of a newly born desire, as yet no larger than a small seed, of getting the better of his tormentors by craft and guile. And quite of itself, from that dark unknown place, whence all thoughts come, came the thought, insinuating and seductive: these people, who laughed at him and bought from him at the same time, clearly expected to be cheated. Why not cheat them then and satisfy them? And he began to understand that life was a game.

Afterward it occurred to him that if life were indeed a game, he would play it more subtly. Instead of getting into a so-called Jewish skin, especially prepared for Jews by Gentiles, he made up his mind one day, after much thought and not a few qualms, that it was by far the better plan to get into one of the skins prepared by Gentiles for themselves. The process of shedding his own Jewish skin and getting into a Gentile one was not easy; he knew it would need all his effort, patience and endurance, but he knew it could be done. The certainty of it gave him courage. A simple accident confirmed his judgment.

It was March 17th—St. Patrick's Day—and as he stood with his wares in one of New York's thoroughfares, a gang of hoodlums, each with a green clover in the lapel of his coat, passed him by with a derisive guffaw. He felt his face grow pale, at the same time a protective smile lurked round his lips and eyes and strove to unbend the blank rigidity of his face, which refused to unbend. The hoodlums passed on. Behind the hoodlums came a tall well-built man, dressed like other men except for a large sombrero hat. His face was brown and full of active lines. There was a green clover in

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the lapel of his coat. He glanced at Sroolik and was about to pass on, but changed his mind and paused in front of the boy. Sroolik's heart jumped. "Look here, my boy," he said, planting himself hard on his outspread feet and eyeing Sroolik with a steady deliberate gaze, "I don't want to buy anything, but I like your face, and so I'm going to give a piece of good advice, gratis. Now don't mind me, kid, if I'm a bit fresh in my way of speaking. You see, I'm a circus cowboy and bronco busting is more in my line. Now, you wouldn't take me for one of God's own chosen people, would you? Well, I am. But one day I got tired of it. Thought I'd do a bit of my own choosing. So, one day I got so mad that I flung my pedlar's pack, one like you've got now, at the face of a human monkey who dared to throw a bouquet of insults at yours truly; there was a scrimmage, result: he got two black eyes and I got seven days. When I got out I didn't go back to my pedlar's job, b'cause I was tired of lis'ning to words that weren't music to my ear. Since then I've been everything under the sun—from a saloon bouncer to a bronco buster. And the moon has no cause to be jealous, either, for I've been a moonshiner in my day. Gave it up b'cause it was a dangerous business, you always had to have your eyes skinned for U.S.A. cops. Now I'm with a Wild West show, always on the road. Now if I was your age again, I could do anything I liked. I could become a Cossack, a Zulu, or a Bashi-bazook, and I warrant you I'd do as well as any of those species we've got in our show now. For all that, I'm a Jew, though none of my pals know it, and it's a long time since I've said my *Shema Israel.** Between you and me and those collar-buttons you've got there, I don't believe God's ever crossed this side of the pond. It's true our spondulix says 'In God

* The famous Hebrew prayer: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, He is One."

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we trust,' but I'm inclined to think that's a mistake in spelling. They've somehow left the 'l' out. And so my boy, I say to you: Chuck it! Get your hair cut! Straighten your face out! Go to Brooklyn Bridge, push that tray of shoe strings and collar buttons over the edge, and don't stop to watch the ripples. Then go to the highest building in the city, put five fingers to your nose, and turn east, west, north and south, like a weather-cock in a cyclone. Then say 'Damn!' three times, and go to some quiet spot and turn a somersault. Then go to a Turkish bath, and steam yourself until you've steamed out all your pedlar's sins and kinks out of your system. Then rig yourself out all new from head to foot so that you won't know yourself, and be neither Jew nor Gentile but just a man. If you must say *Shema Israel,* say it on the q. t. all to yourself. If there is a God He'll hear you, if there isn't, it don't make any difference. In this world, my boy, one mustn't mind being a sheep in wolf's clothing. So just chuck this, chuck it, I say. D'you understand me?"

He looked at Sroolik and saw that he did, whereupon he grasped the boy's right hand, pressed it tightly, with a "Good luck to you!" and passed on.

Sroolik unfolded his fist: there was a crumpled five-dollar note lying in his hand. He stood there as in a trance, and the derisive world went by deriding and touched him not. He looked up at a prospective buyer with the astonishment of one wakened from a dream.

Next day he went again with his wares, and the day after, and the day after, but his heart was no longer in it, something troubled him within; it was as if the stranger had put a new soul into his body, and this new soul had not yet wholly ejected the other soul, his old one.

Who was the stranger? Was he just a man with a good heart, or was he a devil come to seduce him from

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erhaps he dreamt it all? But no, there was the
mpled five-dollar note in his pocket, which he looked
t again and again. Was the note then counterfeit? No, it was quite good. An acquaintance of his had offered to borrow it.

But he was discontented with his own hesitation, with his tardiness to obey a voice so urgent and imperative.

"At last I gave in," went on Sroolik in a broken Yiddish, "I made up my mind to shed my old skin and graft on a new one. I took the greatest pains to study the language of the people. I gave up my pedlar's job, and tried my hand at everything. I've worked as a mill hand, as a carpenter's assistant, as a blacksmith's assistant, as a farm hand; I've been a tramp and have travelled through the states hanging on to freight cars, I have harvested in Kansas and picked oranges in California; I've worked at coke ovens near Pittsburg and laid rails in Texas—my last job was as foreman of a railway gang—mostly Dagoes and Niggers; not one of them suspected I was a Jew; if anyone asked me my religion I'd tell them I was a Baptist. And so you see I'm right in saying that being a Jew is a matter of occupation. Look at what tramping, the most un-Jewish of all occupations, has done to me. It's completely un-Jewed me. And there is brother Baruch in Texas. You know what Baruch was like. Baruch is doing book-keeping for a

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living, and philosophy on the side—for his pleasure. Baruch spends all his spare time studying Kant, Spinoza, Hume, Spencer, and all the rest of the intellectual bunch; he knows Latin and Greek as well as he knows Hebrew, and German and French as well as he knows American. But to look at him, if you had three guesses, you might take him as easily for an Italian as for an Irishman or a Frenchman. Well, you'll see for yourself, for Baruch is thinking of coming East again. It was he who told me that you were here. The folks at home wrote to him."

"Well, Sroolik," said Gombarov with a laugh, "you've developed an interesting theory, and what is more, as far as you are concerned, you've certainly put it into practice. In fact, you'd send your father to his grave if he saw you."

"By the way, how is the old governor?" broke in Sroolik, alias Sam Carney. "Is he still counting the three-dollar bills he's putting away in the Almighty's cash box?"

"Yes, I dare say he's piling up a fortune for himself in the other world. He will be one of its multi-millionaires."

"After all," observed Sroolik, "there's not much difference between him and the nun a Russian chap had told me about in the course of my travels. She was a very pious nun, who spent almost all her time in prayer, and she refused to eat anything for days at a time. Her sister nuns got so alarmed about her that at the end of many days they used to place before her a large tray of the most delicious things such as roast pheasant, new potatoes in butter, macaroni au gratin, young asparagus dipped in cream, pancakes—also dipped in cream—an omelette of a dozen canary eggs, a dish of imported fruits, a glass of port, and other such things, calculated to tickle the ordinary mortal's nostrils with their de-

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licious smell and to seduce the most virtuous palate. But this nun simply refused to take anything, and to all temptations offered by her worried sisters she had but one answer: 'I'm going to eat in the other world.' What can you do with people like that?"

Everyone laughed. Only Iakov was indignant. Iakov, like all good Jews, prayed three times a day, and followed each prayer with a meal. In the intervals he dyed faded garments, which, much to his patrons' disgust, usually resented being sent to the wash.

It was decided to instal Sroolik in the attic taken by Gombarov on his arrival from Russia. Gombarov found his brother useful in arranging his machine-shop, and also as interpreter.

Sroolik had a good-natured contempt for his brother's ideas, which he considered visionary. Indeed he thought his brother was wasting good money on a lot of junk. This opinion was shared by the clerks in the machine firms where Gombarov did his purchasing, and more than once when Gombarov had his back turned Sroolik was not above exchanging a wink with them. Frankly, they thought him a "crank."

Sroolik was on his good behaviour for three weeks. Then one day, while Gombarov was out, he came home quite drunk. Gombarova was quite alarmed, all the more since he demanded money.

Such a thing had never happened in the Gombarov household before, on either side of the family. Not within the memory of anyone. To have a jolly time on festal days and nights, at home or at the house of a friend, was one thing: wine would flow and there would be singing, the flute and the fiddle would urge the dancers on, ribald stories would be told and laughter would sound, every-day proprieties would be thrust out of doors to knock and to knock, unheard by any ear, until joy had had her fling! But to have a man come home

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on a workaday, deliberately drunk on foul whiskey at a public house, while the midday sun was yet in the sky, come home sodden and morose, spitting out profanities, his attitude full of menace—well, that was quite another thing. As far as Gombarova could gather from his thick, confused speech he wanted money. He thought his brother was wasting good money on useless junk, and he, Sroolik, alias Sam Carney, could put some of it to better use: the world, in fact, owed him a living, and he might as well collect it from his brother, before all the money was gone. In short, he wanted money. He thought she must have some about.

Never before had Gombarova faced such a situation. Some of her little ones clinging to her skirts in frantic fear, she did everything she could to calm him, but seeing that this had no effect she threatened to call a policeman. To her great joy, Gombarov came home at this awkward moment.

Upon seeing his brother, Sroolik slunk out of the door. For some minutes his loud, drunken footfalls could be heard on the stairs as he made his way to his attic, where he flung himself on his bed.

"I've never seen a Jew drunk in that way before," said Gombarov. "He thinks there is no God in America, and so he can do as he likes. That's his idea of being free. But where there is no responsibility there is no freedom. My pious father, for all his habits and ridiculous side locks, is a much more free man, for in spite of all his political bondage he dares to be himself. Sroolik wants to be like others. He has taken some of their virtues, but also all their vices. For such is the nature of things: you can't have one without the other. And it's always easier to take the vices."

"Woe to Columbus," said Gombarova.

Towards evening, after he had sobered down, Sroolik tied up his little bundle of personal belongings and

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walked out of the house, once more Sam Carney. Many days and weeks passed and no one saw anything of him.

Gombarov missed his brother's services, especially in his rôle as interpreter. And before long there came a day when he wanted to make inquiries at the offices of a firm about a new piece of mechanism and had need of some one to speak for him, and no one was available that day among his friends. In the last resort, he thought of John. He would take John to speak for him. He communicated this desire to his wife, who in turn communicated it to John.

John demurred and said he would not go. He had his lessons to study. But in his heart he knew that was not the reason, and that his unwillingness to go was due to his fear of men, even apart from his limited knowledge of their language; he was still a wood goblin, unconsciously more familiar with the soft rustle of trees than with the harsh twang of men; he knew that if he went with his step-father, he would stammer and stutter and make himself uncommonly ridiculous.

"Ask Dunya to go," he pleaded with his mother.

She knew the wrath of her husband, and so she argued with John, who felt something in himself growing harder every moment, and his mother's speech was like a gentle saw which in sawing had struck an insurmountable obstruction, the very heart of a small log. His stepfather who was waiting in the next room, came to the open door at that moment and stood listening. His face was pale with anger. He was like a sharp steel axe lifted, waiting to strike at the stubborn obstruction. He happened to be holding at that moment a hundred-dollar note in his hand which he had just drawn from the bank for a new purchase, and in his rage he was on the point of tearing it in two. Gombarova threw herself at him, to prevent him.

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"For the sake of my ded.
He desisted. He d ing. He
said he would take I
John was not ha waited a lit-
tle, all the while t le with him-
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barov would h ffered acutely
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Gombarov household tasks,
but there w n d with her hand
on the br or er eyes, follow-
ing upor et p he womb to the
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CHAPTER VII

JOHN LEARNS OF MYSTERIES IN THE NIGHT

NIGHT, blessed night. 'Sweet is the dear, lightly breathing creature, even in a stone city. Delicious the crisp, dustless air in the street, clean-swept by water of day chaos and day dust. Delicious the enticing smell of fresh bread coming up from the open cellar of a bun-shop. Fantastic the echoing sound of loud footfalls, which approach you from round the corner and go on, and die away somewhere. Refreshing the sight of a waggon of fruit going down toward the river. Strange the interludes of silence, before and after.

A tall man in black evening dress goes by; there is an air of smartness about him as he twists his small bristling moustaches and swings his cane; when he passes under the gas lamp the glare catches his shining high hat, sends a perpendicular gleam of light the whole length of its cylindrical shape; then, after a little while, the darkness swallows him; his blithe footfalls make one think: "He is coming from the club, he has won a pot of money at poker." Or else: "He has been to——" —but never mind, there are some things which had better remain mysteries.

And from the same darkness which swallowed him still another figure emerges, that of a woman, in a dark dress; how slowly and how noiselessly she walks, there is no sound of footfalls to herald her coming; how pale her face, but faintly graven with features in the pale half light, under the broad brim of her hat; how red the

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full lips of her now upturned face, only the mouth and chin in the full light; how strange to see her smile without seeing anything of her face but her pale-white chin and red lips; now she lowers her head and you see nothing but a smile in the shadow; it is as if not a head topped her shoulders but the very substance and essence of a smile, crowned by a hat. A man approaches her from the other direction, with resounding footfalls. As he is about to pass her, she looks at him, still smiling, and sings in an undertone. The song must be for him, for he stops falteringly, and talks to her. She replies, still smiling neither more nor less, just as before. He shakes his head, says "Good night!" and goes on. She pursues her own way. Who is she? Where is she going? Why does she walk so silently, incessantly smiling? Her receding figure becomes the shadow of a shadow, is lost in the darkness.

A small boy with papers under his arm stands within the deep door of a shop, and having, drowsily, but with great interest, watched all that transpired, leans back once more against the jamb of the door and closes his eyes in sleep.

He does not sleep long. Two large hands clutch him by the shoulders and shake him. A working-man's tin food-receptacle rattles on one of the man's wrists. The boy opens his eyes with a start. Ah, it is his mother. His first thought is that he must get up, get out of his soft, warm bed, and go out into the cold, into the night, to sell papers. What a funny mistake! He hears the man's voice:

"You ain't had enough sleep, my boy. Young 'uns, the like of you, ought to be a'bed. I am a full-sized man, and a night-bird from way back, and I can't say as I like it. Come, give me the *Times,* boy, I must be going."

What a funny mistake! It amuses the boy to think

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that he had made such a funny mistake. The State House clock strikes. He counts the strokes:

"One—two—three—four——"

It is four o'clock then. And now he remembers:

An hour and a half ago, he, a thing called John, brought into this world for some reason or other, was sound asleep. But at two-thirty sharp, something at his head rattled, with rapid, ringing hammer-strokes. It was the alarm clock, a devilish thing; and he hated it, and bore it malice, as if it were a person. But he knew he could not do without it. He dared not disobey its imperative call. He would never forget the night in which he had said to himself, as he turned over on his other side: "I will sleep but five minutes more." When he awoke, to his unforgettable horror, he opened his eyes on broad daylight: it was seven o'clock! He remembered how distressed, how disconsolate he was! He thought of the regular customers he had missed—what would they think of him? With what shame he faced his mother —and even Raya and Dunya. Worse than that—he found it even harder to face himself. He had lost his world that day, and he tortured himself with his failure. At school that morning he was reprimanded for inattention.

But that never happened again.

Last night he went to bed at night, and he was up at two-thirty. If he wanted to he could do this even without the alarm clock. For his step-father had taught him that by concentrating his mind at bedtime on the time he wanted to get up, he could do so. He tried this, and it worked—what a nice trick! He was proud of his powers. He had no longer to be waked by his mother, as was the case during the first few weeks, when he changed his hours of occupation from the afternoon to the early hours of the morning. This change took place at the end of June when the school closed for the sum-

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mer vacation. But when the school opened again in September, he held on to his morning hours for selling papers and gave up those in the afternoon. He preferred night to day, because there were less people about in the night, and fewer boys to compete with him and to annoy him. Indeed, he had begun by coming out at four o'clock, but gradually went out earlier and earlier. Three o'clock usually found him sitting on the window-sill of one of the press-rooms, waiting for the presses to begin to whirr over the first city editions. He was the first boy out with morning papers.

That morning, as usual, he got up at two-thirty, dressed himself by candle-light, and stole out of the house quietly, without waking anyone. As he walked out into the street he munched a sandwich prepared for him by his mother. He was still sleepy, but the cool air refreshed him. He walked along feverishly, at times with closed eyes, bumping once or twice into a lamp-post. He had no thoughts. Behind him walked Sleep, and held him back with heavy languid hands; in front of him Someone dragged him forward with active, gaunt fingers. At last he was no longer sleepy; indeed he was intensely awake, and his whole body flared as with ten thousand little flames.

The men in the press-room joked good-naturedly at his expense while he waited, but he had not long to wait. He seized his papers, and ran out into the street, and went on running, until he came to a pair of swinging doors of a beer saloon. Bending down, he looked under these, and found the place full of people. He pushed the small, half-doors aside, and bursting in, he accosted a group of men, who stood leaning against the bar, on which were ranged their "schooners" of beer. The men were munching sandwiches, to which they had just helped themselves from the "free lunch" counter. Without a word, one of the men began to pull out John's

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papers one by one and to hand them to his companions; then with a generous gesture he turned to the strangers in the room and said:

"Who'll—er—er—'ave a pay-per? It's on m-me, boys!"

The words oozed out of his mouth as thick as treacle.

No one responding, he fumbled with a drunken hand in his pocket, and drew out a nickel. John, pocketing it, gave the man a cent change, and was about to go out, when the bar-tender, a good-natured German, with large projecting moustaches like a tom-cat's, thrust a fork into a large steaming sauce-pan, and flourished a sausage, as a result of the manœuvre.

"Here, boy," he called out, "have a dog before you go."

"Bow-wow! Bow-wow!" went up a chorus of voices.

"I'm not hungry," said John, hesitating.

"Not hungry?" said the bar-tender in an offended tone, "there's always room for a dog." Then, seeing that the boy still hesitated, he added: "Don't be afraid, it's kosher."

Everyone laughed. The man who had bought the papers said persuasively:

"Son-ny, that er—dog came f-from Sher-rus-salem. It's er—a circumcised d-dog."

Another guffaw followed.

John, embarrassed, took the proffered sausage, which the bar-tender fortified with two pieces of bread and a dab of mustard. He nibbled at the bread before going out, but once in the street, after carefully glancing round to see if anyone were looking, he flung the sausage with all his might over the roof of a small one-story shop, and ran on. He really believed that these "dogs" were made of dog-meat.

Then he came to another pair of small swinging doors. He pushed these aside and found himself in a very long

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room containing large curious-looking, green-topped tables all in a row. Men in shirt-sleeves, cigars in their mouths, were standing about with long slender poles in their hands and took turns at driving, at the point of the pole, small stone balls, the size of a peach, into little nets provided at the corners of the table and at the sides. John sold a number of papers here, then paused, fascinated, at one of the tables and watched the play of two players, who appeared to be especially expert. Sometimes he would come back much later and find the same players still at play; they played until the day traffic began to noise in the street, and did not grow weary.

John ran on again, until he came to a brilliantly lit place, a "quick-lunch" café. This was one of those places "open day and night"; there was a legend that with each new place established by the proprietor, the first thing he did was to throw away the key, a ceremony duly celebrated with a seven-course dinner and champagne—at a high-class restaurant, of course. The first thing that struck John as he entered the very long room, with its two long counters and the small tables between, was the incessant clatter of dishes, which came from the back of the room, and this terrific noise was punctuated by the stalwart if sometimes inarticulate cries of the waiters, cries passed down the line, as in refrain, until they reached the man near the dumb waiter, who acted as a kind of lightning-conductor, passing these cries underground, where the kitchen was busily astir, a fantastic man-hive.

"Two spring-chickens, sunny side up!"—That meant two eggs fried on one side.

"Two soft on the brain, baked on the side!"—That meant two soft-boiled eggs, and a plate of beans.

"Two hogs, and a bull!"—That meant two ham sandwiches, and one beef.

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"Adam and Eve on a raft!"—That meant two poached eggs on toast.

"One cured leather, done to a frazzle!"—That meant a steak well done.

"Cornbeef and cab-bahje!"—The waiter pronounced cabbage as though the word were garage.

A narrow strip on the inside of the counter, and forming part of it, moved steadily in one direction, and bore toward each customer the dish he had ordered, which he snatched off as it passed him, without waiting for the waiter, who was busily engaged in pouring out coffee. The men sat hunched on high backless round seats, which revolved on a pivot; they sat not as at a meal but as if they were travelling on bicycles; only now and then, suiting the action of their revolving seats, they turned their full bodies toward their neighbours and spoke in loud raucous voices, which rose above the clatter of the dishes like some inverted instrument above a cacophony by a Futurist composer. And all the while dishes clattered, and clattered, and clattered.

And having left behind the din of the place, John was once more in the cool air, running. He traversed street after street, crossing after crossing, and, having stopped again to listen to the whirr of the presses as he bought copies of another paper, he ran on once more as if he were a little running automaton—traversing street after street, crossing after crossing. He turned into a straight, narrow street, bordered with tall buildings and rather dark, until he came to a building rather taller and darker than the rest, for its walls were very solid, and its windows opaque, and its tall, ominous-looking chimney belched forth thick smoke, obscuring the stars. Running the whole length of it, John came to a wide gate, which bore the sign: "No Admission." Disregarding this, he pushed aside one of the grimy wooden doors, and entered an alley. He ran the whole length of the alley, and,

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turning into a small cul-de-sac, came to another door, this time an iron one, which also bore the sign: "No Admission." Again, disregarding this, he pushed aside the iron door, and entered. He walked quickly across the iron-grated floor of the dimly-lit corridor, and, pushing aside one of many doors, entered the main floor of the Electric Light Works, for that is what it was. The floor, as in the corridor, was iron-grated, and a comfortable warmth came up from below, mingled with the smell of machine-oil. The place, strangely enough, was not brilliantly lit; indeed a dozen huge dynamos spun around not too noisily in a kind of half-twilight; there appeared to be no one about; the dynamos spun around like gigantic tops, set going perhaps by God, in a sportive mood, by means of a hawser, left dangling in his hand. For some moments the boy stood awed and fascinated, as he gazed at the monsters, revolving so fast that they appeared almost to stand still. Then he cautiously made his way between the two rows of them, across the floor which he feared to slip upon, and found himself presently before a door of what seemed from the outside to be a small compartment built in within the large room. "POSITIVELY No Admission" was the sign on the door. On the other side he could hear voices. Disregarding the sign once more, he pushed the door open, and found himself in a small room. Its walls were almost completely covered with switchboards, brilliantly lit up, but as the lines of light were shaded on the outside, the middle of the room was quite dim. Here, in the half-dark, sat the dim figures of workingmen, their legs dangling. They were smoking their pipes and talking.

"Hello, Johnny," said one of the voices good-naturedly, "you're late this morning."

John, handing the man a paper, began to explain how the bar-tender and the drunken men had kept him back by trying to induce him to eat a sausage made of the

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meat of a circumcised dog, and how he had outwitted them by throwing the guilty sausage over the roof of a house.

The quintet on the table howled with delight.

"I say, Johnny," said one of them, "won't you show us—you know—"

"What?" asked John in a puzzled voice.

"You know—" prompted the man, with a wink at his companions, "you know—your circumcision—"

"Yes, do, Johnny," said another, "I'll give you a nickel if you do,"—and he put his hand in his pocket and drew out the coin, tossing it into the air and catching it.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said a third seeing that John hesitated, and misinterpreting this hesitation as due to the insufficiency of the offer, "we'll make a collection for you." And, without waiting for an answer, he seized John, and in spite of the latter's struggles, exposed him.

One of the men turned on a hanging light, and undoing the current cord, lowered the bulb, in order to "bring more light on the subject," as he remarked.

Five pair of eager eyes out of the half-dark were focussed on the spot where the light fell. The men laughed, nudged each other's ribs, and passed obscene jokes.

The man who held the light brought it nearer and neared toward John, and at last he touched him with the electric bulb. It was hot, and though he was touched but lightly, he cried out with pain. The bulb was withdrawn quickly, the men laughed. They let him go. Five hands went into pockets, five nickles went jingling into John's hat. The hat had been snatched off the boy's head, and now it was returned to him, with five nickels jingling in it. As John made no movement toward his hat, the man gathered up the five nickles and thrust them into John's pocket, and pulled the hat over the boy's head.

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John, without uttering a word, walked out. And indeed he could not utter a word if he wanted to. Something came over him in a flood, something molten and burning, and sought egress at the throat; something like a valve went down with a snap in his throat and barred all egress. He walked through the large room quickly, across the iron-grated floor, not afraid of slipping, unmindful of the huge dynamos which spun round like gigantic tops, set going perhaps by God, in a sportive mood, by means of a hawser left dangling in His hand.

But now he was once more in the cool air. The cool air blew on him, the cool air refreshed him, the cool air cleansed him with its coolness. He said something to himself, nonsense and inarticulate words; he had this habit of speaking to himself, nonsense and inarticulate words. He was like a little dynamo, silent and full of power and helpless; like a little top set going by the hand of God. What did God mean by it?

The heart of him revolted, grew hard; all of a sudden he began to run, he ceased being a top, he became a little running automaton.

He ran and he ran, traversing street after street, crossing after crossing, and only paused when he came to the door of a pie-bakery; a most delicious smell came up from the basement and filled his mouth with desire. It was on the ground floor, but he shook the latch, and in answer a man came to the door and said: "Oh, it's you!" He went off for a moment, then returned, and pushed a paper bag through the partly opened door into John's hand while John thrust a paper into the man's hand.

John examined the contents of the bag. There were four cuts of pie in it, of four varieties, all hot. They were apple and lemon and cranberry and pumpkin. As he walked along slowly he started on the pumpkin. There was nothing so good in the world, he thought, as eating hot pies.

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He ate two, and thought he would take the others home, but the remaining pies taunted him, and he was not long in consuming a third. He resisted the temptation of the fourth and put it behind a shop-shutter when he got to his corner. It was here that John had watched the man in the silk hat and the woman with the smile and the man who addressed her and went on. It was here within the deep door of a shop that he leant against the jamb of the door and slept, until awakened by the workingman who wanted a paper.

Having realised the "funny mistake" he had made in thinking himself in bed,—and wishing that he was,—he went toward the gutter; here by the curb clean water flowed, for the street had just been flushed; he dipped his hands and put them over his eye-lids. The coolness revived him, his whole body flared as with ten thousand little flames.

Then, all of a sudden, he paused, as he recalled everything—his humiliation of an hour ago. It was as if the ten thousand little hectic flames had rushed together and shot up in a single flash toward his brain, and having evoked in his brain a picture of that little room and the five pair of eyes gazing at him out of the half-dark—and his shame also—the flash spent itself, and falling backward, scattered into ten times ten thousand little sparks, which spread through all the red highways of his body and stung him from head to foot with their annoying little stings, as of a swarm of ants.

What did God mean by it? What had he, a little boy, done to be punished so? But perhaps his uncle Sroolik was right, and there was no God in America.

Rapt in this theological problem, he suddenly realised that a waggon filled with baskets of peaches was passing him by, on its way toward the river. Forgetting his sorrows and God, he became transformed once more into a little running automaton, and having caught up with the

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driver, who was perched on a high seat, he hailed him. The driver drew in the reins, the waggon stopped.

"I'll give you a paper for a peach!" cried John to him.

"Let's have your hat," said the man.

John climbed on to the spoke of a wheel, and handed the man his hat. It was returned to John full of peaches. He passed a paper up to the man.

John returned to his corner and bit his teeth into a peach. There was nothing so good in the world, he thought, as eating a juicy peach.

Of the half dozen peaches he ate three, and he thought he would take the others home, but the remaining peaches taunted him, and he was not long in consuming a fourth. He resisted the temptation of the remaining two, and put them behind the shop-shutter to keep company with the lonely pie.

Once more John scampered off, this time to a third newspaper office, just around the corner, and bought more papers.

By this time, the sky had lightened perceptibly, the great stretching hand of Dawn advanced with outspread fingers to pluck the stars like fruit from a tree and to gather them up in her dazzlingly white apron. Then she touched lightly the foreheads of many sleepers, who awoke and put on their drab working garments; the older men dressed nonchalantly, the young men left the bed of their love with a sigh, the bachelor awoke and thought: "if only—" but never mind what he thought: it wouldn't mend matters any, if you knew. The older man and the young married man and the bachelor were soon in the street, on their way to their work. Now and then a young girl appeared in the street,—a telephone girl, a nurse, or a waitress: awakened by dawn, a mother, or an alarm clock. The telephone girl thought: "I must speak to many." The nurse thought: "I must attend to many." The waitress thought: "I must wait upon many." And

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each one of them thought: "if only—" But never mind what they thought: it wouldn't mend matters any, if you knew. Was it thoughts or people which began to fill the streets? The street lights, more and more pale, blinked drowsily upon passing shadows—shadows, or people—or thoughts now and then one stopped to buy a paper from John.

The day became lighter and lighter. Other newsboys began to appear in the streets. Waggon wheels rattled over cobble, horses' hoofs resounded, the trams clanked. The voices of the city rose more and more clamorously, but it was not yet full day.

A rather large messenger-boy of about sixteen stopped to speak to John. He appeared to be in a very gay mood, and winked continuously, rather naughtily.

"Guess where I've been to?" he asked John.

"Where? How can I tell?"

"Well, you'll never guess!" He winked an eye, and nudged John's ribs with his elbow.

"If I can't guess, then tell me."

"Well, that's how it was," began the boy, "about twelve-thirty a lady blew into the office, a regular peach, let me tell you, her eyes like electric lights, and her clothes all fluffs and ruffles; she had on an opera cloak too, or an uproar cloak, as you and I would say,—she blew in, and says to the manager: 'I want a boy, and I want him quick, important business! And I want him for some time!'" For some reason the messenger boy thought it necessary to wink an eye again and to nudge John's ribs. "As I was saying, she was a regular peach. The manager, he brushed back his hair, and made goo-goo eyes. 'All right,' he says, 'you can have a boy. Our charges are fifty cents an hour. Here, Tim,' he called. Little Tim ain't larger than you. The peach looks him over and says soft-like: 'Can't I have any boy I like?' The manager falls all over himself. 'Madam,' he says,

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'you can have any boy you like.' Then she looked down the long bench, and choosed me. And so I goes along with her. She taked me to her swell apartments, and put before me a swell feed; they were *some* eats, let me tell you! Oysters on shell, cold chicken and ham and potato salad, and apple pie. And she opens up a little bottle of something which sizzed, and says to me: 'A little can't hurt you.' And all the time she stands over my chair and pats my head, gentle-like. Then when I gets done with the feed, she looks at me a long time, and says to me: 'My boy, do you know why I sent for you?' I says nothing. 'You see,' she says, 'I am a little lonely since my husband died, and I'm afraid of the dark, it's a hard thing for a woman to be all alone in the dark, without a man. D'you mind cheering me up a little?' And all of a sudden she begins to cry, and her hair gets all loose. Then she flings her arms around me and kisses me. And I do all she says. She keeps on kissing and kissing me all night in the dark, and won't let up. Then I looks at my watch. 'It's half past five, missus, my time is up.' She lights her light, and looks into her money bag. 'How much do I owe you, darling?' she says. 'I've been here five hours, missus, and company rates are fifty cents an hour.' 'All right,' she says, 'and here is a dollar for yourself. Good night, darling, and don't tell anyone where you've been.'" The messenger pulled out the green note to show to John, at the same time winking an eye and nudging John's ribs again. "Well, I must be going," and he went off whistling a tune, giving one more wink over his shoulder as he left.

While the boy was telling his story, John was laughing, as he was expected to do; but once the boy left, he felt very sad and troubled, and a confused unrest possessed him, he did not know why. His own episode at the electric light works came back to him with all its shame and humiliation, as also an episode of the day before,

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when in the early hours a man, dressed well, but pale and slightly tipsy, begged of him a nickel for a cup of coffee, pleading that he had left his entire "roll" in "a lady's stocking."

What did this all mean? Surely the world was evil. And he was evil also. For he thought of these things, and they gave him a secret pleasure. He was the messenger boy, and he was the woman whom the messenger boy comforted; he was one of the five pairs of eyes which looked at him gleefully out of the half-dark, humiliating him. He was the inflicter, and he was the sufferer. But it was not till many years afterward that this became clear to him. For at that time he was inarticulate, and like Moses' bush something in him burned with fire, and was not consumed. There was this flame in him, and it had no egress. This fire wished to speak, it wished to burn through the crust of his petty life. But other fires came, fires of pity, which overwhelmed this other fire, but did not put it out. For you cannot fight fire with fire. He was in misery, in despair, and he was inarticulate.

The voices of the city rose more and more clamorously, and his cry went to join the others.

"Pay-pers! Paypers! Pay-pers!"

He cried his cry with great vigor, and all his inarticulate fire went into this cry. His body ceased to exist, he had become a cry. In response to it, men stopped to buy papers, but it was not that that the cry was for. Men marked the word, but not the intonation, nor its despair. A wood goblin might have understood it, never the iron sprite of the city.

The street lights had gone out long ago. The sun rose higher on the great man-hive, its rays drew men out of their square cells.

John ran round the corner to see the clock: it was seven-thirty. It was time to go home, run his eyes over

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his lessons, and go to school. He folded the four papers he had left, picked up the bag containing the cut of pie and the bag containing the two peaches, and once more became a little running automaton.

He ran and he ran, traversing street after street, crossing after crossing, easing his pace only at intervals—for his way was long,—until he reached his house. He burst into the kitchen and found everyone at breakfast. He flung down the papers on a chair, and emptied the two bags on the table. With great joy he watched Raya and Dunya scramble for the pie and the two peaches. He held his sides with laughter. He took out a large handful of coins and handed them to his mother, who counted them and said:

"You've had a good day, John."

John flushed, but said nothing. Shame again came to him in a torrent of fire. He snatched quickly at a piece of buttered bread, an egg and a cup of coffee, and having done with his breakfast, he seized his books, and began leafing one of them very quickly. He began to recite in a sing-song voice a verse of Longfellow's he had to know upon that day:

Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal,
Etc., etc.

Then:

Lives of great men oft remind us,
We can make our life sublime,
Etc., etc.

John suddenly thought that he heard some one laugh at him behind his back; he turned round in anger only to find that he was mistaken; there was no one quite near him, and every one had a straight face. He went on repeating the line:

Life is real, life is earnest . . . .

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Then he snatched up another book, this time a history, and went on repeating in the same sing-song voice, as though he were still reciting Longfellow, something or other about Bunker Hill. Then he snatched up still another book, and, without changing his voice, went on repeating something about the Malay Archipelago, and the Suez Canal. Then he snatched up still another book, and, without changing his voice, went on repeating something about the alimentary canal. And Dunya, overhearing him, teased him by asking how far it was from the Suez Canal to the alimentary. John was about to get angry, but he reconsidered as he thought of a retort:

"There is no distance at all, if *you* happen to be on the spot."

Then he slammed his books and tied them up in a strap. He ceased being a reciting automaton, he became a little running automaton on its way to school.

He entered his class and took his seat at the head. He was Number One boy, in the Ninth Grade, having "skipped," as soon as he had mastered a little English, from the Second to the Fourth, and from the Fourth to the Ninth, chiefly on account of his mathematics. He detested almost everything else, especially grammar and physiology: the first because it reminded him of his earlier ordeal with German, the second because it reminded him of his mother's insistence on his becoming a physician. He did not yet know what he wanted to become. In fact, he quite definitely did not want to become anything. For he was afraid of the world, and afraid of people, nothing frightened him more than the thought of meeting new people. Nevertheless he had a great pride, and he studied his lessons with great diligence less for the sake of knowledge than for the sake of being at the head of his class. The one joy he had was

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reading in after-school hours. Every two or three days he went to get a new book at the Free Library. He devoured the Arabian Nights, the many-coloured fairy books by Andrew Lang, and stories of adventure by Verne and Dumas and Henty, and even the lurid "Ragged Tom" stories by Horatio Alger, the American boy's friend. He liked stories in which there was a hero and a heroine—a heroine especially, whom he liked to conjure up as an ethereal being of transcendent perfection. And though in actual life he felt intensely shy before women, these imaginary creatures were very real to him, and they gave him distress and delight, evoking in his too young mind both sensual and idealistic images. As before, there was no one to tell him anything. He read what he liked. It is true his mother mentioned Dickens and Samuel Smiles: he took up "Nicholas Nickleby" and some of the "Self-Help" books out of sense of duty, and was consequently bored intolerably; he tried to convince himself that he was learning something and enjoying himself, though he invariably dropped them before he got to the middle. He no longer read Russian tales, for he was urged to drop everything Russian, if he was to become a good American. Nevertheless, every other day his stepfather taught him Hebrew and read the Bible with him; he got a strange pleasure out of the sound of the old words.

That morning, as always, the school-mistress, a short, podgy woman with spectacles, began the day by reading a few verses from the Bible. Owing to a protest on the part of the parents of the Jewish pupils, she invariably read something from the Old Testament. That morning she read a psalm. The words uttered in a dull and meaningless voice sounded dull and meaningless, and Vanya, worn out with lack of sleep and his night's activity, was asleep before she was done, his head propped on his

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elbows. She put away the Bible and picked up the recitation book.

"Number One boy, please stand up!" she called out.

John slept.

"John Gombarov!" she called out.

John did not stir. The class tittered.

The school-mistress walked up to John and shook him. He opened his eyes in surprise.

"I have a good mind to send you to the principal," said the school-mistress. "It's the second time it has happened this week. Now I want you to recite Longfellow's 'Psalm of Life' which I gave you for your lesson yesterday."

John rose and began:

"Life is real, life is earnest . . . "

He paused and repeated in a faltering voice:

"Life is real, life is earnest . . . "

"Evidently you have some doubts about it," said the school-mistress; "sit down Gombarov. Next boy!"

He sat down crestfallen. But he retrieved himself later when the school-mistress asked the class to write a composition on the Cat.

"How many claws has a cat?" was the hushed whisper which went through the whole class. And John asked the same question of the boy who sat next to him. Though he had been many times scratched by a cat he never stopped to count the claws that scratched him. His guess was the right one. But it was not that which won him the commendation of the school-mistress, who even showed his essay to the principal and to her col-

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leagues. It was the last sentence, which John had put in to fill out the too meagre composition. It was to the effect that the Egyptians regarded the cat as a sacred animal and made sacrifices to it as to gods. John was astonished that this bit of erudition should create a sensation, and he was shrewd enough not to give away the source of his information, a book of Egyptian adventure by Henty.

Then he fell into disgrace again. The boy who sat next to him was to blame. This boy had the not uncommon faculty among boys of investing innocent words with obscene meanings, through association. It happened that the school-mistress, in discussing some quite innocent subject before the class, happened to say some quite innocent word, which however brought to the boy's mind an image associated with female anatomy. He grinned and put his hand to his mouth to keep from laughing, and at the same instant nudged John with his elbow. John understood what was in the other boy's mind, and he too could not repress a giggle. The school-mistress's eyes blazed anger at the boys, and putting down the book she held in her hand, she went over and shook John by the shoulders as though he were a bag of wheat.

"I want you to know, boys," she said, facing her class, "that I'm no cinch."

The two guilty boys left the school together when the bell rang. They were walking together behind a tall school girl in short skirts. A long plait of black hair hung down her back. Her legs were long and sturdy, attired in black stockings. The two boys behind kept pace with her. John's companion kept up a steady grin. At last he turned to John and asked:

"She's a nice—"—He repeated the innocent word used by the school-mistress that morning.

"What?" asked John.

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"She's got fine legs."

John said nothing.

Such was the atmosphere in which John grew, such were his days and nights. Life seemed dull and pointless.

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CHAPTER VIII

DEEPER AND DEEPER—MYSTERIES AND MORE MYSTERIES

"To live in an inferno day after day is to get used to it. To greet morning with a sigh, and night with a curse, is to lapse into a habit, which would be painless but for new, rare and more terrible diversions. To walk in the fetid darkness for ever and ever, without a gleam of light, is to merge with it, become lost in it, steeped in it; a dark fetid thing in the fetid darkness. Habit walks at your side, holding your hand, habit—which is a demon of the fetid, sordid darkness; the darkness that is both of day and night, continuous, everlasting. Men become like insects in the mire, feeding on darkness and are the food of darkness. Fortunate the rare few for whom the dark way in which they wander is illuminated at intervals by flashes of lightning, even though these illuminations reveal horrors exceeding the darkness itself. Certain things happen—rare and terrible diversions, and it is these that break the routine of your inferno, make your inferno interesting, make you conscious that you *are* in an inferno. And these things either kill or save."

In such a manner did John Gombarov dwell many years afterward on his childhood days in Philadelphia, on those terrible days and nights, which were like one long darkness, save for those sudden, those bewildering flashes, which came and went; they were the sharp, forked lightnings, and they clove the darkness, and revealed for but an instant an inferno terrible to behold, fantastic and unimaginable; then the darkness closed in

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upon him, and he wandered on in the darkness, shaken by the flash, the memory of the flash haunting him for days and days.

Sitting many years afterward with his friend Douglass in an A.B.C. shop in London, Gombarov poured out a tale of one of these rare and terrible diversions in his life, and strange it seemed to the sun-loving Englishman to hear his friend thrice-bless so sombre a diversion, and only later, as he sat musing in his own room in silence, did it dawn upon him how narrowly Gombarov's life was saved from being merely sordid by tragic illuminations. This is the tale that Gombarov told:

"You will remember," he began, "the boy, living in our house, who first introduced me to selling papers. He lived with his parents on the floor above us. There were three other children in the family all younger than the boy. They had come some years before from Russia, driven by the *pogroms*. At home Zorakh was a first-class men's tailor, who could make a complete garment and took pride in making it well. There, in the small Russian town, he worked slowly and deliberately. So it was quite natural that his efforts to establish himself as an independent tailor in Philadelphia should prove a failure. He soon found out that only speed and quantity counted here, and, giving up his shop, he began to look for work. Everywhere he heard the same story. They did not employ tailors: they employed only cutters and basters and sewers and button-sewers and button-hole makers and pressers; a man who could make a whole garment was not wanted, because it was against the idea of speed; a man who could make a whole garment was likely to get too much interested in his work, like an artist. At last, swallowing his pride, he began to look for a job as a cutter, thinking it would be the least obnoxious part in the making of a machine-made garment. But he failed to reckon on the law of demand and supply: there was in

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fact a plethora of cutters, but there was a shortage of button-hole makers. And so, swallowing his pride a second time, Zorakh became a button-hole maker. All day he sat making button-holes. Efficiency being a passion with him, he took great pains with these button-holes, but as he was paid so much for so many button-holes—the price depending upon the quality of the cloth —he soon found out that unless he hustled he would not be able to supply his own wants, not to speak of the wants of his family. He soon knew the meaning of the word sweat-shop! His only joy was when he had a better class garment to do and the button-holes required greater care in doing.

"Zorakh, being a sensitive, nervous man, began to see button-holes everywhere; they floated before his eyes in black outlines, but at night they looked at him out of the darkness like green luminous malignant eyes, which followed him in spite of every movement of his head to escape them. But sitting all day in the fetid air of the shop, bent over into a half-arch, even a worse fate overtook him: he began to spit blood. A doctor advised open-air employment. And so Zorakh became a huckster of vegetables and fruits. Bravely, day after day, he pushed his laden cart through the streets, and shouted his wares. He had been at this job hardly more than a week when one of those periodical raids on hucksters was made by "plain-clothes men." Sometimes the prostitutes were raided and were led through the streets half-naked, shivering in the night; sometimes the poor hucksters were rounded up and driven toward the police station, pushing their own carts under a sweltering sun. It was pitiful to see a huge inhuman paw on the collar of each, as if they could escape! and it was pitiful to hear the jeers of the street boys and now and then even of older men. It was both pitiful and grotesque. And only the Jewish men and women stood on the pavements and

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in the doorways wildly gesticulating, indignantly chattering, crying their 'Woe to Columbus!' How helpless they were! Their discomfiture gave the hoodlums great joy, it was such fun to see the Jews in such a fuss!

"The commotion in the street brought us all to the window. We saw what was happening, and we nearly cried to see poor Zorakh in that moving confusion; he pushed his cart with great effort, urged on by a big, burly six-foot-four Irishman, who held up his free fist at one moment in the air as though he meant to strike, at the same time giving a wink at the passers-by on the sidewalk. I remember that my blood boiled in me. I didn't know why these men were rounded up—perhaps they had no huckster's license—but whatever the reason I felt it was unjust—these men were trying to make an honest living. The sense of justice was even then most curiously developed in me, and it seems to me that in my indignation I could almost have thrown a stone or a rotten egg at Zorakh's tormentor at that moment, regardless of consequences. I remember I looked up at my stepfather. His face was pale, his features drawn, and his fists were clenched. My mother held his arm, as though she feared he would do something rash. She must have thought of that night in Russia, when in his fury he pulled up a young birch sapling from the ground and belaboured with it some unwelcome visitors, who ran from the demon-like man in sheer terror of their lives. He did not speak until the little procession had passed. Then he said: 'One can understand why Moses killed the Egyptian.'

"Zorakh was taken with the others before a magistrate, and, unable to pay his fine, his cart with its contents was confiscated, and he got seven days besides to make up the measure. Poor Zorakh served his seven days, then went home and to bed. He was very ill, beyond hope of saving. He lingered on for some weeks, and between

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the earnings of the boy and small charities his family managed to go on living.

"I remember knocking on the door one afternoon, hoping to find the boy in. Serele, a little girl, opened the door to me. She had a frightened look on her face. She said in half-stammers: 'Father is looking so queer, and there is no one at home. I only wish mother would come in.' With a fluttering heart I went into Zorakh's room. He was lying on the bed with his eyes wide open, and his body rose and fell with his heavy breathing. On seeing me he tried to speak, and though his lips moved the words would not come for some time. One of his hands appeared to seek, to grope, for something. I then understood, he wanted a hand. I put my warm hand on his cold one, and that appeared to revive him for a moment. A smile struggled to his eyes, and words to his lips. 'I w-wish—I w-wish you—a hap-py—' He did not finish his words. Something suddenly seemed to lift him from his bed, shake him violently, and drop him back on his pillow. Seeing him very, very still, and as it were smiling just a little, I became frightened, and ran out of the room, with Serele at my heels. Zorakh was dead.

"Yet it was not Zorakh's death that was the terrible diversion I spoke of in the beginning, but what happened afterward, on the day of his burial.

"Imagine then to yourself the same sordid room; a pine box containing Zorakh, supported on two chairs, is in the middle of the room, the sun penetrates the drawn green blinds and falls in a ghastly green glare on Zorakh's pale face, softened somewhat by the gentle but flickering light of the candles at the four corners. Three old women, their figures bent, their heads wrapped in pale bandanna shawls, their faces unseen, sit at the head of the coffin like three lamenting fates, and they drone and croon in a low monotone a dirge-like indistinct

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primitive litany, which sounds strangely as though from afar, a faint murmuring from dumb inarticulate throats —sorrowful and endless.

"A terrible curiosity drew me to look at Zorakh. The same smile that I had seen before still appeared to hover in some indefinable way, appeared to suggest the harbouring of some happy momentary fancy, the passage of some benevolent thought, which had become arrested at the very instant the spirit had left the body.

"The widow, a tall gaunt woman, with a demented look in her eyes under a bulging forehead, sat in the next room and was being comforted by her neighbours. Death had wrought a truce in her relations with the dead—for poverty is no friend of conjugal happiness—and for the while softened the hardness of her second nature, which, as you may know, is nearly always stronger than the first; she recounted again and again his manifold virtues, which would surely be considered at the Seat of Judgment; she told of his brave, uncomplaining days in bed; of course, he had left her ill-provided for—what with her three little ones that three hundred dollars of lodge money wouldn't go very far; still he must have expressed a death-bed wish for her welfare, and the good Lord, the Care-taker of widows and orphans, would surely not disregard it; she believed in the death-bed wish as strongly as she did in the existence of an omnipotent God and of the Evil Eye. She wondered, and again she wondered, as to what his wish might have been: if she only knew! if she only knew!

"I happened to sneeze at the moment.

" 'There!' she said, 'it's as true as he's sneezed!'*

"A cold sweat suddenly passed over me as I suddenly realised that Zorakh's death-bed wish was for me! And

*The sneeze is regarded as a good omen among the Jews, as it must have been also among the ancient Greeks, for we find mention of it in Homer's Odyssey and in Theocritus.

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I thought: if she only knew! if she only knew!

"And what was worse, Serele was there, Serele heard it also! Suppose Serele should tell!

"At that moment three or four of Zorakh's friends were standing in the doorway, discussing the sad happening.

" 'He was a good man—a good man!' one of them was saying.

" 'He was not only a good man—he was also a good Jew,' added an old bent man with beard and locks, whom Rembrandt might have painted. He was attired in a black capote and black velvet skullcap, a Jew unmistakably of the old school.

" 'Oh yes, rabbi, but he worked on Saturdays!' said derisively the youngest of the group, who was a Socialist and did not believe in God.

" 'That's very true, young man, but we are in exile, and God will forgive us much. If it is to sustain our lives, He will forgive us even the eating of pork. As one of our sages tells us, there are only three things He won't forgive: Idol worship, murder, unchastity.'

"That aroused the ire of the Socialist.

" 'Oh yes!' he cried, 'the really unforgiveable sin you do not mention at all. It's capitalism, and includes all three. You talk of idol worship—but you have men here who worship the dollar; you talk of unchastity, yet these men have driven more girls to the street than the Lord can ever hope of saving; you talk of murder—murder—look then at Zorakh—is it not murder? I tell you it's murder—worse than murder—because they kill you so slowly.'

" 'Perhaps it was eating pork that did it!' went on the Socialist pitilessly. 'And what will be Zorakh's reward in the next world? I suspect he will be put to making button-holes on the garments of the dear little angels.'

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"Then, while the rabbi went to attend to his duties, a third speaker intervened with the ironical suggestion that Pharaoh had his Moses, the capitalist of to-day his Marx, that Marx indeed was an up-to-date Moses, who ejected the God of Tablets of the Law, and had put in his place the God of Statistics. The argument waged hot and might have gone on indefinitely, had not something happened just then, something terrible and grotesque, something quite unlooked for.

"It was just after the coffin had been nailed down and was being lifted by four men that a tall gaunt woman with dishevelled hair swept past the disputants like a whirlwind, almost knocking them over, and leaping through the door she hurled herself upon the coffin, and made it fall; it rattled violently as it struck the floor.

"It was Zorakh's wife.

"When I saw what happened a great fear possessed me, for I at once understood that my terrible secret was out, that Serele had told her.

"She fell upon the coffin, clutched at it as if it were a living thing, hammered it hard with her bony hand, and cried all the while:

" 'Have me in mind, my husband! Me—and not the boy! Do you hear, husband? Have me in mind! I am your wife, and you have children—and it's me you ought to think of.'

"The pine box resounded hollow under the blows of her hands. There was consternation among the mourners. Two men laid their hands on her shoulders and tried to drag her away, but she embraced the coffin in the deathlike grip of both her arms, and sobbed, and cried through her sobs:

" 'Your last wish must be for me—me—me—I say me!'

"When at last they stood her upon her feet, she was assailed with questions:

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" 'What is the matter?'

" 'Why make such a scene?'

"She tried to tear herself out of the hands of those who held her. Suddenly she caught sight of Serele, who stood frightened in front of her. She managed to seize the child by the arm.

" 'Tell them, Serele, what he said to the boy before he died. He wished him luck—d'you understand, he wished him luck, him—a stranger, and me he forgot. He wished me nothing! nothing! D'you hear, people, he wished me nothing!'

"She stood there like an animal at bay. She wanted to throw herself on the coffin again, to beat it with her head, her hands; she wanted to tear her hair, to shriek so that the dead might hear. They had great trouble in leading her away, and she went on shrieking as she was being led away:

" 'Have me in mind—me! me! me!'

"The coffin was borne quickly out of the house, placed in an ordinary cart which waited for it, and was hurriedly driven away."

Some minutes passed by before John Gombarov spoke again.

"Well, that shook me up," he said at last. "I could not sleep for nights, thinking of that tragic flash. What was my own darkness, my own pathos and sadness, to that mad woman's sharp tragic pangs on seeing her world slipping from her forever, a world which had hung on so frail and perilous a thread as a death-bed wish, now irrevocable? Although it was not my fault, I felt full of pity and remorse, as if deliberately I had taken from her all the hope she had; gladly, gladly, I would have given her wish back to her—if only I could! And yet, lying there of nights, sleepless, a great comfort came to me from that terrible event. My troubled darkness receded

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and receded, became a nothingness before the fierce tragic blaze, and at those moments I ceased to think of myself and my troubles. And only later, much later, I began to understand why this was so. The illumination came to me during my first days in London, where, lonely and troubled, I used to take down from my shelf a play by Sophocles or Euripides, and found that it soothed me, rested me, lifted something from me, absorbed my own petty sorrows as light absorbs darkness, as the great sea of sorrows takes to its welling bosom all the sad rivers and streams. And I began to understand why the Greeks dedicated their theatre-temples to sorrow, why their tragic plays were as much a religious ceremony among them as any other religious ceremony. How fortunate was the Athenian in that he had a way of purging himself of his sorrow, in losing his own sorrow in the tragic doom of Medea, Agamemnon and Œdipus Tyrannus!

"And so it was that the stranger's sorrow helped me on my dark way. If it had been merely sordid it would have added to my sordidness, but being so sharply tragic it absorbed all sordidness. I don't mean to say that the thing was as great as a Greek play. But it was in its own way, a profound and tragic illumination, which at the time seemed to have served a need in my life."

"All I can say," observed Douglass at the end of Gombarov's narrative and philosophic reflection thereupon, "is that you were not born in the right age. The time is out of joint for you. What makes me think so is a play I saw the other day. It was called 'Barnborough Sits Up' or some name like that. Barnborough, you see, is the usual Yorkshire industrial town, and when the curtain goes up, that is when the fourth wall is removed—for that accursed fourth wall is responsible for nearly all modern drama—you are dragged in, as it were, to witness the usual family squabble in the usual Barnborough household. There is the usual bawling by the

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usual factory girl, who lost her virtue to the usual scapegrace son of the usual factory owner on the usual week-end, which began with the usual joy-ride. The week-end, as you may know, is a great institution. If it were abolished the English lawyer and the English dramatist would lose their occupations. To return to the Barnborough household. There is of course a great fuss made about the girl's lost virtue, and it is unanimously decided by her parents and his parents and the real fiancée of the guilty young man that, having robbed the poor girl of her virtue, he ought to take the girl with it. And so he is coerced into making a proposal to her. Well, you would say that never could a girl have been seduced under more auspicious circumstances. But no! The dramatist gets in his great stroke of work here. The girl will simply have nothing to do with the young man! She has had a jolly good time while it lasted, and that was all there was to be said about the matter. There is a sensible girl for you. Moral of the play: There is no reason for making such a hullabaloo about a factory girl's lost virtue. Well, Gombarov, I wouldn't advise you to see this play if you have a sorrow that you want lifted from your heart."

"It seems to me, Douglass, that the subject ought to make a fine comedy, and the next best thing to a fine tragedy for lifting one's sorrows is a good comedy. The Greeks had Aristophanes as well as Sophocles."

"That may be true," answered Douglass, "but the trouble with this play is that it is neither a tragedy nor a comedy, it is a sordedy."

The two friends laughed, and Douglass called for liqueurs.

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CHAPTER IX

A TRAGIC HERO GOES SLOWLY BUT INEVITABLY TO HIS DOOM

WHATEVER else one might have said of the life of the Gombarov household at this time one could not in truth have said that it was a *sordedy*—to use so apt a definition invented many years afterward by John Gombarov's friend. It might have been had the Gombarovs been usual people, but they were not: their characters were sharp and decisive, clearly defined to outsiders if not to themselves, and the foggy squalor of poverty did not obscure them. They were poor now, almost beggars, not bourgeois: had they been real beggars, their beggars' rags could not have hid the tragic poise of their torse, the timeless, the eternal. They formed a world quite apart, a world in conflict with itself, and in a sense in conflict with all the outer world, toward which they presented a united front, a thing as it were of discords melted down to a harmony. This outer world, taking time off between their routine tasks, discussed the Gombarovs, and thought them "a queer lot." What right had a man, the father of so many little ones, to spend his money in that way, on all that useless junk? What right had Gombarova, the mother of so many little ones, to countenance this expenditure? The men thought: were they only in Gombarov's place! The women thought: were they only in Gombarova's place. They knew what they would do with the money. They would start a small dry goods shop, and they would keep everything

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in it, from a needle to a pair of open-work stockings. There was always a new girl born into the world, and every girl wanted both a needle and a pair of open-work stockings. A pair of open-work stockings was a net to catch a young man; ergo from a pair of open-work stockings to a bridal trousseau was but a step. From a trousseau to a layette was another step; they wished no one so ill a fortune as not having little ones; little ones were a blessing to you while you lived, and when you died there was some one left to bless your memory, to say *Isgadal v'Iskadash** for you. And the dear little ones—God bless them!—wanted clothes, and more clothes; the dear little ones had a way of growing, almost from day to day, like the little wild flowers in the fields—God bless the little wild flowers!

There was Jacob Geltman & Co.,—Jacob himself begat the "Co."—Joe, Louis and Ben—Ben really did not count, he had a hankering for art, graven images attired in open-work stockings had also an attraction for him—never, in his case, leading up to the indiscretion of a trousseau; well then—there was old Geltman, the father of the trio, what was this old Geltman seven years ago? A mere beggar. If not a mere beggar then a mere pedlar. A trifling difference, vast in its consequences. Once a beggar, always a beggar; but a pedlar—well, a pedlar was merely the bottommost rung of Jacob's ladder. A well-stocked dry goods stall was the second rung; it was next door to a fishmonger's, and Jacob had the strange and almost childish naïve idea that if a woman went out to buy a herring she ought to buy a pair of open-work stockings also. He came to this idea by a process of pure deduction. When he saw a young married woman buy a herring—and he knew her to be married by her calm assured manner, just as he knew the unmarried one by her fluttering ways—well, then, when he saw a young

* The opening words of the Hebrew prayer for the dead.

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woman buy a herring, or two, presumably for her lord and provider, he argued to himself that it behoved that young woman to keep her dear one's love. The little fishes done up with bread crumbs and butter and a little heap of small new potatoes dipped in sauce was one good way, to be sure; but that was not enough, we do not live by bread alone. And he reasoned to himself: if the young woman had netted her dear one with a pair of open-work stockings, and in a sense also the little fishes—for a young man is not only a dear one but a provider also—then it behoved her to keep and cherish his love by renewing again and again the net with which she had caught him; the strongest of nets have a way of wearing out.

There was another thing: an aside to be sure: there is a popular legend—this was before women had pockets—that a woman keeps her money in her stocking; well then, if this was true, and if she kept it in an open-work stocking there was a chance that some of it would dribble through in one way or another. To be sure, there will always be folk to find flaws in a man's reasoning, and to say that it is far-fetched, but if you pinned one of these fault-finders down, he would admit in the end, if he was an honest man, that Jacob's reasoning was not any more far-fetched than the reasoning of some of our profoundest philosophers, who loved going round in a circle, as on a merry-go-round, without getting anywhere. After all, Jacob's philosophy was no hobby-horse. It led him somewhere, brought practical results. And that was the thing to judge by. For him the earth was still flat, not round; for him the little stars shone as little twinklers, not as myriads of worlds. And if you had told him that So-and-So had left Philadelphia going in one direction and had come back to it without retracing his steps, or that a number of men had gone in a ship to discover the North Pole, or that Professor Sharpeye sat up nights

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with one of his eyes glued to the bottom end of a tube which pointed toward one of the great constellations in the starry heavens, he would have remarked in a tone of utter contempt: "What a waste of time and money!" —in a less agreeable mood, due perhaps to indigestion or a bad day's business, he would have dismissed the matter even more curtly with the remark: "They are simply *meshugah!*" which, in good Hebrew, means crazy. Only at the mention of the canals of Mars he might have pricked up his ears. Canals? That meant there were sensible people even in other worlds. Canals meant trade, traffic. Canals meant straight lines, which led somewhere. Something appealed to him in straight lines. He had a curious and deep antipathy to circles. He liked the long straight streets of Philadelphia, down which the people and traffic poured in one steady stream. He liked that long interminable line of stalls. There were the neighbour's bigger fish strung high on a line, and on a line running parallel there dangled over his own stall a row of fancy stockings and fluffy things dear to a woman's heart: the whole thing was so arranged that if you began by looking at the fish your eyes almost inevitably ended by resting on these frail, feminine delights, a fatal hesitancy which gave the watchful Jacob a chance to harangue the fair one upon the virtues of his wares and the boon they would confer upon the charming purchaser.

But all this was long ago. For the time came when Jacob Geltman's stall grew into a shop; Jacob and his sons and daughters stood behind the counters, while Jacob's earlier place outside the shop was held by a professional "puller-in." Later this personage was dispensed with as not in keeping with the growing dignity of the shop, which was becoming a small department store. And so the house of Geltman & Co. was established, and its one constant object from now on was to add "wings"

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to itself, with which end in view old Geltman bought from time to time another and still another of the neighbouring properties, until it might have been said of the Geltman fortune that it fairly soared on its multiple "wings." The Geltman house now maintained forty employees, men, women and girls, who were paid poorly but neither better nor worse than elsewhere. All in all, to judge by results, old Jacob saw that the Adonai was with him, and in virtue thereof he scrupulously attended the synagogue every Saturday, to thank the good Adonai for all mercies, great and small. And in this respect again he was neither better nor worse than his successful Christian brother up-town who ran a Sunday School class to ease his mind of its too golden burden. Ah—thought two Pharisees of two different religions in two different parts of the town—ah, what a burden gold is, what a responsibility! And to save the poor from such a dire fate, the managers of the various departments of the Christian and the Jewish stores, up-town and down-town, received a periodical notice to cut down their expenses.

But assuredly—to judge by results—Adonai was with Geltman. What was still better—*the devil was not against him.* Perhaps Jacob's reasoning was false, and neither Adonai nor the devil were with him or against him. Perhaps he was "small shakes" for either, and it did not matter to either whether he was rich or poor, happy or unhappy, whether he lived or died. Perhaps he prospered simply because he went on without hinder from either.

But this tale concerns itself not with Jacob Geltman and his sons and daughters and his growing wealth and his pious habits, but with Semyon Gombarov, marked for ill fortune, whose ill fortune nevertheless flared against the prosperity of the other like a blossom of red flame against a grey drab wall. He was godlike, and so God held aloof from him; he was godlike, and so the

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devil was against him. God and the devil made a pact, that God should hold aloof from him, that the devil should hinder him; God was so sure of him, the devil was so sure of him. As for Semyon Gombarov, what did he think of God and the devil? He gave thought neither to the one nor to the other. Unconsciously perhaps, he belonged to one of the gods of the old hierarchy of the gods, and just as one speaks of a man as being in Christ and Christ being in him, so one could say of Gombarov that he was in Vulcan and that Vulcan was in him. For—as John Gombarov held afterward as he looked back on his fated stepfather—the old gods were not really dead, but they were all crucified as Christ was crucified, and their spirits spread themselves among men, each according to his kind, as surely as Christ's spirit had flooded the souls of certain men—and John Gombarov added with his usual irony: "Not necessarily of ministers of the gospel." Indeed, he held that there were pagans and artists who were much nearer the Christ-spirit than some men who donned black and fastened their collars at the back instead of the front. In one or two cases he had even detected emissaries of the devil in this garb.

To return to John's step-father, Semyon. He was of god Vulcan, or better of his Greek prototype, Hephaiestos. He was lame too in a sense, having started life under a handicap, if not physical then material; but he loved metals and fire, there was joy for him in the sight of molten metal and in the sweat of his face; and his crucibles were as dear and as sacred to him as the sacrificial urn to any pagan priest performing ancient rites. He gave his everything to this, his wife's and his children's everything also, nothing else mattered. Such a man was Semyon Gombarov.

And now he was penniless. "Quite right too!" said some of his neighbours in their hearts, having prophe-

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sied that he would squander his money, and elated at the coming true of their prophecy. The truth was that he had at last, after nearly two years' labours and experiments, completed the installation of his work-shop, and all he lacked was the capital necessary for its running. Where was this capital to come from? Gombarov spent his days looking for capital, and these days stretched into weeks. Men with money winked an eye at their partners when Gombarov with samples of his work turned towards the door to go out. What a funny man! As if they had nothing better to do than help poor inventors. Why, if they wanted to sink their money there were so many more pleasant ways of doing it. They might do it at the gaming table, or by playing the races.

He advertised in the papers, and received a number of answers. Strange-looking visitors came to the house, mostly of the get-rich-quick type, with small capital. They had expected to find a practical, alert-looking business man; instead they found a fervent visionary who was burning up with his own enthusiasm. All that was very well in its place, but enthusiasm was a bad thing in business; in business you wanted to have a cool head, a head as cool as ice and as hard as ice, and there should be no warmth of any kind about to melt out even a few frail tears; a business place ought to be as cool as a refrigerator; sentiment is dangerous; even a cool, hard piece of ice may melt. Business is business, war is war, life is life—there is your businessman's imagination for you. But suppose you were one of those ridiculous pessimists who had read Goethe and agreed with Goethe about war, trade and piracy being on a par and you had come to this businessman and had said to him: "Business is hell, war is hell, life is hell," he would have looked you up and down with a frozen glance and thought that you were an anarchist, a lunatic, a dangerous person who ought to be put under lock and key. At best, if he had

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a kind heart and detected a look of sadness in your face, he would have thought to himself: "Poor chap, he is a failure, he hadn't enough stick-at-it-iveness!" But no!—zealot, anarchist, fanatic, lunatic, failure, or whatever you might be—for once you are wrong, if you think the business man has no imagination. Haven't you read his advertisements, more wonderful than the literature he reads, haven't you seen his marvelous dancing electric signs on Broadway for which he pays thousands and millions of dollars just to please your eyes? Haven't you delighted in his quaint epigrams, with their real literary flavour, which he repeats privately to his partner on a day when business is dull? "A sucker is born every minute," has now become public property, but the revised version says "every thirty seconds," which of course doubles one's chances of success. A more esoteric epigram is an improved version of a *mot* of Sheridan's which in its new dress appears: "Every man ought to have a dollar, it doesn't matter whose dollar it is—" The word in the original *mot* was of course "wife" instead of "dollar." The American business man's version is obviously an improvement, because it is much less immoral to want a man's dollar than a man's wife, "but this attitude," observed John Gombarov to his London friend, "is somewhat discounted by the fact that the average business man in America is of the opinion that his money entitled him to a virgin, not to other men's leavings, and having once got hold of his virgin and made her his wedded wife, she, by virtue of her surrender, in her turn demands that her lord and master dedicate all his time to extracting, for her sake, other men's dollars, a task which not only keeps her in ample funds for shopping and pleasure but also keeps him too busy to think of coveting other men's wives. One is quite enough in the circumstances."

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In some such words as these John Gombarov held forth for the benefit of his English friend.

"You talk as if some American 'peach' had chucked you," observed Douglass sarcastically.

"Not one, but three, my boy," replied Gombarov, good-naturedly. "Such fine girls too! Each one stipulated that she couldn't possibly marry a man without an income of at least fifty dollars a week, and so in each case, after considerable love's labour's lost—or much preliminary sparring, as you would say—I had to throw up the sponge! As they say in America: 'Every man has his price.' But it's nothing to the price of a woman. However I'll tell you about it some other time. But I was telling you about my stepfather." And he went on with the story, which was substantially as follows:

Now if the business men resented Semyon Gombarov's enthusiasm, the "sharks" welcomed it; a shark, it is easy to guess, is a human biped who lives by taking advantage of others. They welcomed it, because by feigning enthusiasm they could find their way to a prospective victim's heart; for an enthusiasm on both sides is like a door on one side of which is written "Pull" on the other "Push," and if one pulls and another pushes, the door, however heavy, opens easily. And so the sharks responded to Gombarov; those who came knew something about metallurgy, of course, and one or two came persistently in the hope of catching him off his guard and of wresting his secret from him. But Gombarov was no fool, and he showed them just enough to excite them, and did not reveal to them any actual clue as to the composition of his gold-like metal. Their admiration was real about the actual products: knives, spoons and forks, of which he had made a dozen or so samples. The sharks, seeing that nothing was to be done with the man, lost their enthusiasm and stopped coming. Gombarov, unwearingly, scoured the town from one end to

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the other in quest of a partner. He went to see Jacob Geltman, among others.

He walked along the interminable rows of counters of white fluffy things, and the girl shop-assistants stopped for a moment the fiendish movement of their jaws over their chewing-gum, and giggled. They never did see such a funny man—

"Well, I never—"

"I do declare—"

"Why don't he get his hair cut?"

"Ain't he the limit?"

"I wonder wat dat guy wants."

Jacob Geltman, seated in a large revolving arm-chair in his private office, soon knew "wot dat guy wanted!" Gombarov unwrapped his samples and exposed them to Jacob's astonished gaze.

"They look like gold—nearly," said Jacob with genuine admiration at these table utensils which resembled real gold. "Look, Ben,"—and he called over to his youngest son, him who had a weakness for graven images, both in stone and in flesh—"what do you think of this? Why, a chap may now be born literally with a golden spoon in his mouth. They'll be making beds of roses next, the sort you like, Ben, eh? Oh what a world! Oh what a world!" Old Jacob rubbed his palms together like one dumbfounded at the idea of being born in a bed of roses, with a golden spoon in one's mouth. Surely, when that happened Messiah, the long-expected, will have come on earth. And at the thought Jacob began to hum the opening lines of a Yiddish song:

"Says the poor man to the rich man:
'The good day will come when you and I
Shall hobnob together'—"

Then as if suddenly realising that the visitor had come on business, he said:

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"I'll tell you what I'll do for you. If you will send me a sufficient supply of your knives, spoons and forks, I will give them a special display, a whole window all to themselves. I may even arrange a small dining room in the window, with a table covered in first-class style; there shall be table napkins and everything; there will be little wax manikins around the table, and at the head of the table the mother will sit—I'll pick out the handsomest wax figure I've got—and she'll ladle out soup to her little ones with one of your golden ladles. What do you say to that?"

"Unfortunately, these are all I've got," said Semyon Gombarov. "In fact, I've come to you to see whether I could get some capital to run my works." And Gombarov proceeded to explain to him all the circumstances of his position.

"Mmm . . . Mmm . . . " Old Jacob grunted, and, removing his spectacles from his nose, he swung them up and down in his right hand. "Mmm . . . " he grunted again and again, and finally turned to Ben:

"What do you think of the proposition?"

"There's something in it. It might not be a bad thing."

That settled it for Jacob. He merely asked the question to gain time. He had an absolute contempt for Ben's judgment: after all, how can anyone with a hankering for art and women be trusted with business matters. The fact that the inventor's ideas appealed to Ben was enough to settle the matter.

"You see," said Jacob in a faltering manner, "I'd like to help you, but I am planning another wing to my store, and I need all the ready cash I've got. A department store, you see, is a great responsibility, a great responsibility. You can have no idea what a worry it is. You are really to be congratulated that you have no department store. If you had one it would simply drive you

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mad. I assure you it's a strange state of affairs: here I own all this place and yet I haven't a penny of pocket money. That reminds me, Ben, don't forget to leave me fifteen cents for lunch before you go. And there's that new wing to build. We Jews are such a poor people. Look at all those rich department stores up-town. They nearly all belong to Christians, and the others belong to German Jews, who try to ape the Christians in every possible way. But the Christians are always richer. We Russian Jews are mere bagatelles beside the Christians. Look at Rockefeller, look at Carnegie, look at Morgan. What ten Jews put together can make up a sum as large as any one of them can muster. They point to the Rothschilds in Europe, but just consider, I beg of you, how long it took the Rothschilds to collect their wealth. They are not merely rich men, they are a dynasty. I feel ashamed of the Jews when I think how really poor they are. It's not that they are poor, but that they are not clever, for if they were clever they would be rich. The Christians are clever folk. One Christian can put a dozen Jews into his pocket when it comes to cleverness and to making money."

"I quite agree with you," said Gombarov, who stopped for another hour to argue out the question, for Gombarov had a way of hobnobbing with all sorts of people. Then he wrapped up his samples and left.

"Old god Vulcan dug metals out of the heart of the earth, the ancient Christ dug love out of the hearts of men. Men now owned the earth and the metals of the earth, and their great possessions filled their hearts, there was no place for love. Vulcan and Christ and all the crucified gods walked the earth, and there was no place for them on the earth. It is true there were great furnaces working, and there were many huge temples erected to Christ; nevertheless, there was no true joy in men's

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work and there was no true love in men's hearts. All the fires were sterile: the fire in the blast furnace, the fire on the altar, and the fire on the hearth. Was it for this that Prometheus stole fire from the gods to give it to men, and suffered therefor? Was it for this that the Son of God and the Son of Man gave abundantly of His love to men, even all He had, until there was but a single gasp left in Him, and He cried in this gasp: 'O God, O God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' Who can tell what was in His mind when Christ cried His cry? Was it not that in looking down from the cross upon that sea of leering faces, a feeling of utter despair came upon Him and a thought in His despair: He had lived in vain, He had loved in vain. Death in itself was nothing, but that they were putting Him to death—was not that a proof of His failure? God, His Father, had not granted Him sufficient love, sufficient art. The sense of His failure must have overcome Him, crushed Him utterly. For He was an artist who tried to make a perfect statue in flesh and blood, but when in that terrible instant they came to life, when in His pain and torture He opened His eyes, He saw a sea of gargoyle faces. And the most perfect Christian art has been of gargoyles ever since, as witness the Gothic temples, though it is true it has not been without its angels, happy and smiling only when painted by the pagans of the Renaissance, when Vulcan and Christ and all the pagan and Christian gods walked hand in hand and there were no petty quarrels either among gods or men."

"A bit preachy, isn't it?" said John Gombarov, showing Douglass the above passage he had lately written in his notebook, inspired by the memory of his stepfather, whom he had so violently hated at one time of his life. His stepfather had made him suffer so, and he also made his mother suffer, as well as all the little ones. His

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neighbours had thought him utterly selfish, and his neglect shameful. What mysterious and unconscious process of thought and emotion made him then express himself so deeply and so benevolently about so unworthy a parent? Ah, but there were days he remembered, days in which his stepfather appeared to him dear and radiant like a stray sun ray, which fell upon one's heart without seeking and warmed it with a curious impersonal warmth, that was neither of love nor of hate but beyond either.

There was one day that he especially remembered in all that endless welter of arid days, and upon that day Semyon Gombarov, after an absence of hours, blew in like a buoyant breeze into the house, and scattered the cloud of gloom which had been hanging almost motionless over the house for days. He was like a big boy who did not know what to do with himself. He lifted one child after the other in his arms and cradled them back and forth in the air until they were weary with delight.

For at last, at last, the son of Vulcan met a son of Christ.

Semyon Gombarov met a man after his own heart. This man had but little money, but he liked Gombarov and his enthusiasm and trusted him. If he lost his money, very well—then he lost it. There are such curious people in this world, who are sure to provoke their neighbours to call them lunatics, and all because they choose to spend their own money in their own way, as their own whims move them and not those of their neighbours. For days and days on a time these two men were inseparable. They did not even take the trouble to draw up a form of their partnership.

Gombarov sent in a large order for metals, and his partner drew up the necessary cheque. The metals were to arrive on a certain morning and Gombarov went to his machine-shop to be there to receive them. He walked

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along happily and buoyantly, thinking of his metals and the magical fires. He would begin work that very morning. Hope blazed in his heart a multi-coloured flame, hope blazed in his heart a rainbow of fire, hope blazed in his heart a Catherine-wheel, which sent out sparks in all directions, a spark for his wife, a spark for his every child; Gombarova's long cherished dream would come true: Vanya would be a doctor yet. But he, Semyon Gombarov, he was the heart and the brightest colour in that flame, he held up the rainbow with out-stretched arms—from end to end—from finger-tip to finger-tip, he was the vortex—the immovable centre—of that Catherine-wheel.

He walked along dreamily, his eyes turned inwardly. He walked along a world in himself, impervious to the outer world. Then automatically he halted, for he suddenly realized that he was at his place. Almost at the same instant he realised that his way was barred. There was a little throng gathered around the curb, along which stretched a rope, barring the way. The figure of a policeman loomed in front of Gombarov. Gombarov was near-sighted, and he bumped into the stalwart figure.

"Where are you pushin'?" said the policeman with some irritation.

"My shop is upstairs," answered Gombarov.

"Oh—" said the policeman, lifting the rope to let Gombarov pass. "You can go up, but you won't find much worth lookin' at, let me tell you. There was a fire here last night."

Without saying a word Gombarov entered and walked up the charred and gutted stairway. There was no need to use the key, for the doors had been broken in with firemen's axes. Gombarov entered his workroom. The policeman was right. There was nothing worth looking at. The large pieces of machinery were ruined by fire and water, the small delicate mechanisms were ruined

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utterly, the leather belting was for the most part almost burnt to cinders, twisted wire lay in little heaps and barred one's way, drops of water still kept dropping from the roof, the whole room was one hopeless ruin.

As if the meaning of the whole catastrophe had suddenly dawned on Gombarov his face grew white; the blaze in his heart went out: he stood for a long time, deprived as it were of all power to think or to move, and contemplated with half-dead eyes what an ill wind had wrought. Then, in a half-stupor he walked down the stairs and past the policeman, without a word. The policeman winked his eye at a pal and remarked:

"I reckon that little Jew ain't half so glum as he looks. You bet your sweet life he'll collect his nice little pile of insurance. You don't catch a Jew napping at that game, no sir-ree!"

This time the policeman was wrong. Gombarov had not insured his property. Earlier he had had no money to pay the premium—and some companies would not even consider the insuring of Jew-owned properties; later, when he had got his partner, he thought of the matter but kept putting it off, reflecting that a day or two did not matter. That was then how things stood.

About ten days afterward Semyon Gombarov received a notice to remove his property, as the owner wanted to rebuild at once. And so that which had cost him thousands he sold as junk. He received a hundred dollars in consideration. Everyone agreed that it was a very good price. After all, a hundred dollars was a lot of money, much more, at any rate, than some of them had. With that money it was not yet too late to start a dry goods stall, and with any kind of luck he might even do as well as Jacob Geltman & Co. The neighbours were good people and they meant well, but there were certain things they could hardly be expected to know.

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For *God held aloof from him, and the Devil was against him.*

Alas, alas! There was no Sophoclean chorus of old men to render homage to Semyon Gombarov and his "woes innumerable."

But the man in the street who heard the tale from a pal chuckled as if it were something funny, and remarked:

"And so the old bloke is down and out!"

"Yes, Charlie, *down and out* is the word."

"Why, Jim, you could have got a million schooners of beer for the money."

"Yes, indeedy."

"The old fool! Well, well, down and out!"

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CHAPTER X

AFTER ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS ŒDIPUS COLONEUS

After Œdipus Tyrannus Œdipus Coloneus. After the rapid tragic clash the more slow, more palling tragedy.

Everything that had to be had come to pass, but if the fates were against Œdipus they did not withhold from him the boon they grant every tragic hero as his inalienable right: the fulfilment of his own doom. He was no miserable rat caught in his own hole, waiting to be smoked out.

Œdipus had wrought his own doom, was the active instrument of his own fore-ordained destruction. Endued with the tragic will, his life breaking all barriers and dykes poured itself out in that short hour in a raging torrent, which dislodged and swept along every obstruction. Then, when its force was spent and his own hand had brought to fulfilment the gods' will, he found himself deprived of all that had made him an exalted being and his life worth living. The great Œdipus, King of Thebes, who had saved Thebes, had become a blind wanderer.

Nevertheless—Œdipus, a blind, dispossessed, querulous old man, was still a potent force, an instrument of the tragic will, and a perpetual curse to his offspring, hardly less to those who loved him than to those who did not.

Even from his grave he wielded a power, greater perhaps than when alive, of which he was not unaware—having been apprised by the oracle, wherefor during

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his last pilgrimage to Athens, he begged Theseus, King of Athens, not to reveal his burial place to anyone.

There are all sorts of gods and men, and all sorts of kingdoms, both gods' and men's. To find one's kingdom impossible, untenable, is to be banished from it, set wandering like a blind beggar, in eternal darkness.

Thus also it was with Gombarov.

He had wrought his own destruction, was the instrument of his own fate. His dæmonic energy was at the root of his tragic will, directed by a still greater will, which encompassed it as the universe encompasses the world. You twirl and twirl—you flatter yourself that it is of your own accord; but all the time you are held within the gravity of your own orbit.

The gods are dead, the oracle is dead; but the gods still live in men, godlike men; and oracular words, foresighted words, are on the lips of wise, foresighted men, godlike men. Could you have found one such wise, oracular man, could you have put Gombarov's case before him, could you have asked him what were Gombarov's prospects of success, he would have told you, would the wise, oracular man, that there was no chance whatsoever for Gombarov, that he was indeed a godlike man "riding for a fall." Gombarov could have told you so himself.

How did the wise man know, how did Gombarov know, and if Gombarov knew why did he persist in following the road of his doom?

One knew and the other knew, but neither knew absolutely. Each knew that the likelihood was there.

Had Gombarov known absolutely, it would not have changed matters. To know one's doom is to go towards it. Every man who is half-man, half-god, bears the seed of his own doom within him, and that seed bears fruit according to its own soil and the elements which work upon that soil. The great element in Gombarov's

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case, watering and sunning the seed of doom, was America.

Even in the earlier days he felt the something incomprehensibly hostile to him in America's atmosphere, and as if he even then had had the tiniest glimmering of a stealthy impending beast approaching him in a dense forest, he experienced momentary hesitations during which a strong desire was awakened in him to retrace his steps, to return to Russia, to be among his own kind. He broached the subject to Gombarov a half dozen times, but what was the use of that? There were the little ones to think of, always the little ones. The Gombarovs were a constellation of tragic stars, now fixed and unalterable, obeying laws of gravity. There was no turning back.

And when the blow came the fixed relation remained unchanged, save that the bright-flaming star of Semyon, then at its zenith, appeared to lose some of its lustre, as if it were wrapt in a cloud of mist, and through this mist his bright flame diffused itself in a kind of dead light, more terrible than the other.

He sat there, in the house, during those first days, like a pale dead god taken down from the cross, and with Gombarova, hardly less pale, standing behind him, the picture made a *pieta* not less impressive than the remote *pietas* we know, painted in convention by Flemish and Italian painters.

Gombarov's black hair showed for the first time spots tinged a steel grey.

O the silence, wave upon wave, reverberating like a far-spaced sea! It was almost more than Gombarova could bear. If he would only lift up his voice in anger and curse, yes curse—anything, anybody, men, devil, God, America—O woe to Columbus! But that holding of breath, that unbearable silence—more full of terrible imprecations than any speech. It was like looking into

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a dark abysmal cavern in which you thought you saw the moving, many-gleaming fires, the furtive alert eyes of wild beasts, silently circling.

There was too much for Gombarova to do to permit her to brood too long at a time. There were the little ones to attend to, always the little ones. And they, the little ones, were not untouched by this atmosphere of brooding, which settled upon the house; it gave the faces of the older children a dull, frightened look, as if question and reproach came at the same instant, and this instant lingering was caught and imprisoned, and fluttered thereafter in their eyes like a newly caged bird, for days and days.

They were, however, quick to follow their mother's example, and to busy themselves with their customary tasks. The gloom of the house went as it came, like smoke; but as even smoke leaves its traces, so the effect of the calamity was to leave an irritating if undefinable sediment, which at odd times gnawed at one's spirit, corroded it with its charred particles and cinders.

The house to all appearances was the same, yet it was not the same.

Besides, there was the old, the thereafter old Gombarov in the house, no longer the young Vulcan with the attributes of his patron-god; and the sight of him sitting in silent contemplation or pacing restlessly up and down the room, his hands folded behind him, went to one's heart like a stab, reopening a young wound, the blood oozing therefrom drop by drop, causing twitchings of pain as of a slow, dull toothache.

Slowly but inevitably old Gombarov came back to life, and there were days when he shook himself like a shaggy dog who had lain too long in his manger and took a brisk walk or stopped at the house of an acquaintance, sitting up with him until dawn, discussing and subtilising on matters of Hebrew theology.

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The emotions the sight of his stepfather aroused in John were of a contradictory character, the pendulum of the boy's mood swinging between pity and hate: pity for his stepfather's own suffering, hate for the suffering he caused others. And this mood was shared in a measure by the elder children, Raya and Dunya, children by their mother's first husband. The others were as yet too young to understand. Nevertheless, they also, his own young ones, had undergone certain experiences of his influence, rather more subtle and therefore more dangerous than the step-children. For they were of his own blood, he was the oak and they the branches, and there was no sprout, no leaf on those branches, but that it had his sap in it. Why, his own son, Absalom, now barely six, ran from his father one day when the latter threatened him with chastisement; and as he ran he shook his fist at his father and uttered cries of defiance. While this was happening Gombarov bore a grave face, but afterward, when he was in his own room with his wife, he laughed gleefully at the recollection of the scene. After all, there was joy in the reproduction of one's own kind. For that matter, none of the children was a garden flower, but all grew wildly and unattended. They were children, destined to remain children, with children's outlook on life. And like children, fated to suffer, they did not know why they were brought into the world, the meaning of their lives, and why it was their lot to suffer and the lot of others to be happy.

The presence of old Gombarov was a mystery to them. Other fathers worked all day and came home in the evening. Their father stayed home most of his time and went out when he liked. And his constant presence was as the presence of a dead, dull light, a thing sunless and cheerless. This light permeated and poisoned the spirits of all, and there was no escape from it. Life for a

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time ran in a groove, and the stream of tragedy ran in subterranean channels. Although this was a period of inactivity, Gombarov's mere presence continued to affect the fortunes of his circle.

Œdipus Tyrannus had become Œdipus Coloneus.

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CHAPTER XI

THE ELEMENTS SPEAK IN THE COUNCILS OF THE GOMBAROV HOUSE

WINTER had come again, a very cold winter after a very hot summer. In the autumn the days had been hot and the nights cold, and this made the Gombarovs, unused to such rapid changes, very jumpy. John continued to sell papers, while Raya and Dunya were away all day in a shop where they made artificial flowers, and they came home in the evening with their fingers stained with dyes and sore from the prickles of wires, which served as stems for the flowers, flowers as aromaless as their lives. There were evenings when they brought with them a little bundle of "home work," consisting of these wire stems, the petals and the hearts of flowers. After supper these several parts were spread across the cleared table, and every one who could helped in the work. Elsewhere John sat over his own "homework" which the teacher had given him that day, and this was not less mechanical or less tedious than the other. Nearby, close to the stove, sat old Gombarov over a newspaper, and now and then, lifting his eyes from a particular item, he would remark: "What a world! What a world! Ah, this America!"—and he would repeat the context of the item to Gombarova.

Having finished his lessons and slammed his books, John walked over to the table, picked up an artificial daisy and began to pluck the petals: "She loves me . . . she loves me . . . she loves me . . ." But in

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spite of all his efforts the petal would not give way. Then Dunya saw what he was doing.

"Look, mamma," she cried, "John is destroying our work."

This made John angry and stubborn, and he would hold on to the flower until two or three pairs of hands forced him to relinquish it.

"You ought to be ashamed to yourself," his mother would say, "you are quite a young man—and you expect to be a doctor!"

"I don't want to be a doctor," retorted the boy.

It was quite true. He had no ambition to be a doctor. He hated nothing more than his physiology lessons. For the manner in which they studied their physiological charts at school was calculated to give the pupils the impression that the subject was a branch of geography. But his mother, in spite of the loss of their small fortune, could not conceive of her son being anything else than a doctor. She lived on this hope like a good Christian on the hope of future life. How this miracle would come to pass it was not given her to see, but she was one of those rare beings who fundamentally believe in miracles. This faith was a need with her, and it helped to sustain her.

All the facts of life contended with this attitude. John was now thirteen; why, at his age the elder brother Feodor, who stayed with his father, was an educated man. John was a baby, a mere suckling, in comparison. But Gombarova reflected: After all America was a free country, and every one had a chance; it was a country of self-made men, and even a bootblack, so she had been told, might become president. As for becoming a doctor, why she had heard about two or three ordinary peddlers who had got their degrees and were full-fledged "medicoes." Not that it had not occurred to her that nine out of ten of these pushing young men had merely

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exchanged the objects they peddled. At first it was collar-buttons and shoe-laces, now it was mixtures and pills. They nearly all wore Vandyke beards to look professional and respectable. But a beard was not enough. The acquisition of a horse and trap and a wife was the final stamp of professional efficiency, and it brought shekels into the pocket of the practitioner. Old Gombarov again and again gave vent to his contempt for them in no uncertain terms; he thought these young men with their priggish, conceited ways ridiculous in the extreme, for he judged men by what they had to say and not by the cut of their beard, and he had greater delight in talking to a bootmaker and a blacksmith among his acquaintances than to a dozen of these triangular-bearded numskulls. Only the other night he had stumbled upon a small cluster of them in the back room of a chemist's shop, and heard one of them tell gleefully how he had prescribed an unnecessary cough mixture for a woman in pregnancy. He despised the petty lawyer tribe even more, he had been a litigant himself and he knew the sort they were, rogues every one of them, whence arose the thought in his mind: "Law and honesty are a contradiction." Nevertheless, he admired the really clever rogue for the ingenuity he could put into his roguery; it was purely a mental process and it fascinated him as much as the intellectual roguery of a Hebrew theological debater. He was not above roguery of a sort himself when the occasion required, and if roguery be too strong a word then wiliness will be an excellent substitute, and in this quality of wiliness he was not far behind "the godlike Odysseus," who was admired by the gods hardly less for this quality than for any other.

After the failure of his project, following, so to speak, a period of mourning, Semyon Gombarov, still in his middle age, but now referred to by the neighbours as "der

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alter," that is, "the old one," began to give some attention to the training of his children. He deliberately employed the word training in preference to education, for he associated the latter word with methods which seemed to him quite bad and quite useless. There was too much obsession with careers, not enough with character. When Gombarova protested against his ideas and urged the children's need of preparing for careers, he would get intensely annoyed and retort: "It's a nice world it would be if women had the run of things." He procured all sorts of books on the psychology and training of children, in three languages, Russian, German and English, and read them critically, accepting what pleased him, discarding what displeased him. Having arrived at certain fixed ideas, his mind came to regard his children as a kind of base metal, which he wanted to melt down and transfuse into moulds and shapes of his own making. He was in fact engaged in the task of trying to change their spots. That they were his own spots, deep and ineradicable, never occurred to him. He took the elder children out for walks and explained to them the sun, the moon and the stars, and the workings of the universe. He tried to take them behind the great scene, where Stage Manager Jehovah, pressing a button, released the thunder; where, pressing another button, He pulled up the tides of the sea. He explained to them the currents of the air, the winds, and the internal cataclysms which buried Sodom and Gomorrah, Pompeii and Herculaneum.

"What is the use of it all?" Gombarova once asked. "What is the good of knowing why the snow falls, when you are up to the knees in it and your boots have holes?"

That remark drove Gombarov into a temper.

"That's just like a woman," he said, raising his voice. "Always looking for a use in everything. Why, you are

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becoming as practical as an American. I have a good mind to go to Russia and try my luck there again."

The threat had its effect. Gomborova was sorry she had spoken. Though she knew he had no money for such a journey, she also knew that once he had made up his mind to a thing he would move heaven and earth to carry it out. Meekly she busied herself again with her household duties.

As for Gombarov, having quickly recovered from his outburst, he resumed in his natural voice, for Katya's benefit, his explanation of the shape of snow crystals.

Katya sat listening; but her eyes, busier at the moment than her ears, fixed themselves over her father's shoulder on Absalom who was making faces at her. She found it irksome not to be able to retaliate.

But none of the children received such marked attention as the step-child Dunya, and only towards her he displayed those little tokens of warmth, condescending to the human. That was not to be wondered at, she was growing up into a bonny girl, full of quick, active sympathies, and, considering her surroundings, cheery to a great degree. But Raya, the eldest girl, quiet, domestic, and self-effacing, was rather neglected. Her heart of gold lay quietly and deeply within her; and covered over by homeliness, as gold is often covered over by the homely earth, it gave out no glitter.

John was only little less neglected than Raya. It was true that his stepfather taught him Hebrew. It was their one point of contact. But beyond this, old Gombarov was shrewd enough to see that the young sapling contained a small but stubborn knot, not to be conquered by any weapon without the weapon being blunted. Apart from this, between the paper selling, his school, his home lessons and his Hebrew and his few hours' sleep, there was but little time left to John to listen to lessons on the wind and the snow-crystals. But one night he learnt

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much about them, and what he learnt upon that tempestuous night affected the fortunes of the whole Gombarov household.

Upon that night the alarm clock struck, as usual, at two-thirty. As usual at two-thirty, John drowsily opened his eyes. There was a strange feeling in his head, as if the mechanism of the alarm clock were inside, where the brains usually were; but there were no brains there now, only the mechanism of the clock, and it hammered on the shell of the skull from the inside, as if his skull shell were of metal; that was why, when the little hammer hammered, the shell that was his skull rang and rang with a rapid bell-like clatter. Then the ringing stopped, and with its stopping the boy's consciousness began to return, not without lapses, and in one of these John had the curious feeling that he was in his bunk in a ship crossing the North Sea, that he had left Russia only some days ago and was on his way to America. What sort of place would America be? It loomed before him a wooded mysterious mountain. There were little pathways everywhere, going up, up! People such as he had not seen anywhere, emerged from among the trees, and taking him by the hand, they led him to their huts and treated him with loving kindness. This idyllic scene vanished. He was lying in his bunk, feeling very sick. The winds blew with fury, the waves dashed wildly at the ship, the ship plunged and reeled, righting herself each time. O why had he left Russia? Everything was blotted out. Again consciousness came to him. No, he was not in his bunk in a ship on the North Sea. That was long ago, so long ago! For he had just stretched out his hand, and it touched the alarm clock. Nevertheless, he felt strangely, as if the house were really a ship plunging through a dark sea. And it was not to be wondered at, for after this last lapse a

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clearness came, like a new door opening, the other doors he had passed through closing as it were behind him; and looking through this new door, the last door, he suddenly realised that a terrific snow storm was raging outside. The wind blew and shook the house, the shutters down the street banged and rattled in rapid succession as if a desperate madman had run amuck and with white frenzied hands tried to tear them from their hinges; something whistled weirdly through the chimney as if it wanted to enter and could not; something moaned in the small alley between that house and the next as if it were a host of wood goblins frightened out of their tree hollows; and hearing their restless moan many a lonely, loveless sleeper clutched at his bed-cover and pulled it more tightly over his head and ears. John remembered one such night in Russia, when clinging to Marta on top of the warm stove he heard her say: "I'm here, don't be afraid, Vanya *golubchik!*"

John raised his head and stopped to listen. Well, it was weather, simply not fit for a dog, as his mother would have said. But a dog was one thing, and he was another. He was a human being, a boy, that is a man, and a man could always stand more than a dog. Throwing off his bed-cover with a vigorous if desperate movement, he jumped up, quickly put on his things in the dark, and groped his way toward the kitchen. He lit a candle and went to the tap to wash his face over the sink. A thin stream of water was running from the tap, and it had been left running all night to keep the water from freezing in the pipes. The water was unpleasantly cold, but it braced him, and after he had rubbed his face vigorously with a towel he felt much refreshed. Then he lit a small oil stove and made himself some tea, which he poured into a tall tumbler and added thereto a generous slice of lemon. He sat there quietly, sipping his tea, listening to the pandemonium outside and thought

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there was nothing so good in the world as sipping hot tea with lemon. He had just finished munching a sandwich when he heard low muffled footsteps in the next room, and his mother appeared in the doorway. In the faint flickering candle-light she seemed a white sad-faced ghost. She said in a low voice full of anxiety:

"I wonder whether you hadn't better stay in tonight."

"No, I think I had better go. What will my regular customers think?"

His mother went back into the dark room and came out again.

"Here, put this on."

It was a sweater. John pulled it over his head with his mother's help, and put his overcoat on. Then his mother went back into the dark room and returned with a scarf. She wrapped it round his neck and tucked it in under the collar of the overcoat. She kissed his forehead and told him to take care of himself. John blew out the candle and went out. He felt his way down the stairs by running his hand down the banister and shivered when he reached the ground corridor.

He seized the handle of the street door and began to pull. For some moments the door would not give way. Then, giving a vigorous pull with both hands, it yielded, but the angry hands of the wind, seizing the handle on the outside, shut the door to again, with a slam, pulling John along with it, leaving him again in darkness. The wind roared as it tore along, it whistled and laughed maliciously at its boy captive who longed for freedom; then forgetting the boy, it howled loudly and weirdly, and its howling sounded like the howling of all the wolves in the world, their heads lifted high crying as in one throat toward the pale moon in one prolonged slowly dying moan:

Ooh-h-h-h-h. . . .

But the boy standing in the darkness there was not

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yet beaten. Brute strength must be fought with cunning. This time, with almost superhuman effort, he opened the door again and quickly interposed his body between the door and the jamb; pressing between the two, he slowly extricated himself. The door slammed behind him with a great bang.

But having won the first encounter and forced the first barrier, the real battle was yet to begin.

Once outside John felt himself seized by the long, enfolding fingers of the wind, which, gripping him, nearly knocked all his breath out of him. Then, for a moment feeling himself released, he walked cautiously down the steps and on to the sidewalk, which was covered over with snowdrifts, as yet showing no trail of human footfalls. He waded through the deep snow, lifting his feet very high, and the violent gusts of wind hitting his face, he had to pause to take breath. The black smokeless chimneys, row upon row of them, peered out of the white-topped roofs, grim and black monuments, symbolic of despair, endless in monotony. The iron skeletons of fire-escapes, almost wholly covered with snow and icicles, made some of the houses appear like ruins, grim and fantastic. Hundreds of wires stretched in all directions across the street and over the roofs, and many of them having been brought down by the storm, dangled and swayed with every motion and current of the air. The electric lights, which dotted the streets at regular intervals, were smothered under snow, and the light they gave out was depressed and dull, as of mist-obscured moons. The air was a heavy purple, and this purple was cut by white active curves, air currents made visible by snow drifts to which they gave swooping wing. John, as he plodded along, never knew where one of these impetuous white birds would come from next, or on which side it would catch him with its strong, wide-sweeping wings. Sometimes he felt one of its sharp

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wings across an ear, sometimes its struck him as with a lash across his eyes, sometimes its whole body seemed to plunge headlong into the middle of his back, only to make a circle and return a moment afterwards to hit him with full force upon his chest. Or was there a whole flock of these white-winged, invisible-beaked birds let loose upon him all at once?

As John closed his eyes, the air now was motionless beneath their hovering, now active with many-winged flight before assault. When this combined assault came the boy panted and reeled. Now his small body lurched forward as if someone gave him a sudden prod from behind, now it tottered backwards as if someone pushed him maliciously from the front. He was given no respite. When the big snow-birds were tired and resting, then swarms of small white insects came in headlong flight and struck his face, burying their crystal-sharp, needle-like stings into him. He closed his eyes in pain, and lowering his head, he pressed his body forward and walked against the wind very much like a young he-goat about to butt. He feared most the street crossings, for the wind was treacherous, and, as if lying in ambush for him, it had a way of sweeping round the corner suddenly and of tripping him up.

Two voices spoke to him. One said: "Go back, go back, go back!" The other urged: "Go on, go on, go on!"

When a cold blast came he felt as if he had not a single stitch of clothing on him, and his very brain froze, and he could not think. But for a full five minutes the wind was quiet, and John felt happier. The worst, he thought, was over. But he no sooner came to the next crossing than a great icy fist, as of an arm drawn back to the elbow then shot forward, struck him full force, and he fell full face in the snow. He lay there quietly for some moments, hardly knowing what had happened to

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him. The snow-drifts, like carrion-birds, swept over him. Something whistled, something moaned, something laughed. He had no body, he was in a world of sounds. He was a sound also; he had become a warm sob, merging in the other sounds.

Then he felt warmer. As he lay there, hardly daring to breathe, he felt his blood, absent before, diffuse itself through his whole body, through every atom of it. Then he felt a warm fluid dripping from his nose, and he thought it was blood. But no, it was only his nose running from the cold.

His consciousness returning, he suddenly grasped the situation, and a terrible storm rose in his soul, a terrible anger, a terrible resentment against the tempest, against life, against God Himself. What right had they to treat him like that? Something like a knot tightened in him, something hardened in his heart, grew stubborn. Like a wounded enraged wild animal he rose on his legs, and clenching his teeth and gripping his small fists, he began to run. That was his way of defying the storm. The wind blew furiously; the snow-drifts, in great broad curves, flew over and around him, brushing him with their wide sharp wings; myriads of needle-stinged insects assailed his face; strange weird sounds fell upon his ears. Let the winds blow, let them whistle, let them moan to their hearts' content! Nothing mattered now, he was not afraid; he ran on, superhumanly cutting his way through the snow and the wind.

He ran, panting, into the newspaper pressroom, and planted himself near the steam radiator. He went on rubbing his hands. The men standing behind the long counter piled up with papers looked astonished. The foreman in charge, who usually sold him the papers, walked over to him. His face was serious and stern.

"What do you mean," he said, eyeing the boy, "by coming out on a night like this? Ain't you got a mother

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and father? Were you born on a winter night in a barn? Now answer me, you brat. I have a good mind not to sell you any papers."

Then, seeing the crestfallen manner of the boy, his voice softened. He took a small flask out of his pocket and uncorked it.

"Here, take a swig of that, I reckon as it won't do you any harm."

John took a gulp from the proffered flask, but not being used to whiskey, it caught his throat as in a flame, and he began helplessly to sputter out what he did not swallow. The men looked on and laughed good-naturedly.

"Here, this will be more to your liking, Johnny," said one of the men, bringing up a steaming hot cup of coffee.

"I guess if that boy goes on like that he'll die an early death," said the man, returning from his kind mission.

"You'd better have another guess," observed another. "Take it from me, any kid that's got spunk enough to go to his business on a night like this will come to something. I am ready to bet anyone a plugged dime to a bum cigar on that proposition!"

"He's a little Jew," said a third, "and Jews don't die, they linger. And they go on lingering until they have brought a couple dozen of kids into the world. And then they go on lingering until the whole job lot of them is married. And they go on lingering until everyone has brought a little brat or two into the world. Then the old geezer begins to think of kicking the bucket. He goes through the performance before a large and appreciative audience, as the papers would say; before a full house, in fact. I say, Johnny," the speaker called to the boy.

John came nearer, and looked questioningly.

"Johnny, how many brothers and sisters have you?"

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The boy screwed up his face, and appeared to think. Then began to count upon his fingers.

The men looked on astonished.

"Don't you know how many brothers and sisters you've got?" asked one of them.

"Not offhand," replied the boy, wholly oblivious of the amusement he caused.

The men burst out laughing, while he who had made the long speech looked at the others in triumph and said with unconcealed glee:

"Well, boys, what did I tell you?"

John felt very much abashed.

But he was saved from further questioning by the presses beginning to run and the men going to their places.

Before long John got his papers, and out he ran, taking his accustomed route and stopping at his accustomed places. Many a scolding and many an extra nickel he got that night for his venturing into the storm. The man at the bakery put an extra pie into the bag.

Meanwhile the storm had begun to abate, and by daylight the wind was gone, leaving no traces save for the curved-topped banks of snow. The sky was now as clear as crystal, the cold was intense, there was a sense of crackling in the crisp air. The frost took a delight in pinching with his fingers the boy's nose, in nipping his ears, and in tickling the bottoms of his feet with a burning, irritating itch.

The day being Sunday, he did not return home until after twelve o'clock. Once home, his night's battle with the storm began to tell, and a feeling of utter exhaustion, long repressed, came over him. He was quiet all that day, and his mother anxiously attended upon him.

That night he could not sleep, for his right foot began to swell, and though he made an effort to obey the alarm clock when it rang he found that the least stir gave him

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agonising pain. He lay there with closed eyes, his mind and heart full of alarm lest he should die. Now and then he moaned softly to himself, and his mother came to him and put her warm hands on his restless forehead. He buried his face in her hands and he cried softly. Then he heard a soft voice murmuring the old familiar words:

"Vanya darling, don't cry."

And those quiet hands and that soft voice soothed him to sleep. Dreams came to him, none of which he remembered, and he moaned in his sleep softly at what he saw, and it seemed strange to him when he awoke that he should have this curious feeling of having seen so much and yet that there should be nothing that he could remember.

And it was strange to him to open his eyes on daylight. He did not appear to know where he was at first. But soon he felt the presence of that right foot, which had gone on swelling, and it all came back to him: the night of the storm and all that had happened to him that night, and fragments of his dreams clamoured to be allowed to pass the doors of memory, and not being allowed to pass, they went hurling themselves against these doors and to torture themselves and the boy with their desperate importunities.

He could not go to school that day. But that was a small matter compared with the foot itself, which did not get better but worse. Gombarova grew quite alarmed by mid-day, and thought of sending for a doctor, but a vision came to her of those uncouth, half-raw youths, with their incipient Vandykes, their desperate pretension to manners and erudition, their professional surface—a shell far too thin to hide their colossal and bursting ignorance; and for the life of her she could not see how she could possibly trust a case as serious as John's appeared to be to such monstrous nincompoops.

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If Gombarova felt rather strongly on the subject—and rather intolerantly in the opinion of her neighbours—it must be remembered that she had come of a family of physicians, with whom the science of medicine and surgery was a tradition, its followers forming a priesthood not less sacred than any other. And it occurred to her that she might send her boy to the hospital, where at least he had a chance of having the attention of specialists and the care of nurses. She decided to send him to the Children's Hospital.

The question was how. It was true he had been up for an hour and that he could manage to hop short distances on one foot, but the way to the tram which passed the hospital was at least a quarter of a mile, and though it was warmer than it had been, deep snow and sleet covered the ground.

John himself settled the matter.

"I think I can manage with Dunya's help," he said.

By way of illustration he seized a stick and leaning his right side upon it he hopped round and round the room, performing the circuit each time with unusual rapidity.

After many demurs Gombarova at last consented. Not being able to put on his shoe, she wrapped up the foot very carefully to keep it dry and warm, and took precautions for the rest of him as well. He walked out of the house, and leaning on Dunya, hopped along at her side.

Once in the street, John found that it was one thing to make a one-foot-hop exhibition across the floor of a small room, but that it was quite another thing to hop across the wet and the slippery sleet-covered sidewalks, even though he had a strong support in Dunya. The way seemed endless, every sharp breath of air acted as a barrier, he was soon tired. They came to a crossing. The sleet was deep near the curb, and the snow, no longer chaste, deprived of its whiteness and graceful wind-

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formed contours, now lay in dark and shapeless little heaps, unrecognizable as snow, and spoken of by indignant pedestrians as mud banks. John leant very heavily on Dunya and eyed the wretched chaos, which appeared to him to be beyond his strength to pass. But Dunya, asking no questions, lifted John, who was almost as large as herself, in her arms, waded boldly through the sleet and the mud, and only put him down after she had borne him safely across. Then, leaning once more upon her, he hopped his way a short distance, and paused again, all out of breath. He put down his swollen foot upon the ground for a moment and lifted it again quickly, making an outcry of pain.

"Dunechka," he said, his right arm around her neck, "let me rest for a moment, I am tired, I simply can't go on."

Dunya, again asking no questions, lifted him in her arms, and with this burden, almost as heavy as her own weight, walked on at nearly her usual pace. Both his arms clung round her neck; he felt tenderly towards her at the moment, and he vowed in his heart that he would never annoy her again; he never forgot, she had endeared herself to him forever.

As for Dunya, she walked on silently, and let not a sigh or a word to escape her to show that she was tired.

"I say, Dunechka," he said at one moment, "you'd better put me down now, I can walk myself now."

But Dunya would not listen to him. She bore him in her arms a long distance, which appeared endless to him. And she never let him know by either a sigh or a word how endless it appeared to her also.

She did not put him down until they came to the crossing, where they waited some time for the tram. After what seemed like a long time it came, and, lifting John once more in her arms, Dunya carried him into the tram,

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and putting him down on the seat she sat down beside him.

"I might have carried you pick-a-back," she said suddenly, "it's funny I hadn't thought of it."

A genuine regret came over him because he had not thought of it either. He not only might have been easier to carry, but he would have enjoyed it.

They both thought at the same time of their days in the Russian woods, days in which they played at pick-a-back, see-saw, hide-and-seek, blind-man's-buff, and what not.

"I say," said John thoughtfully, "I wonder why when boys and girls grow up they stop playing at pick-a-back. It's such fun."

"You silly!" exclaimed Dunya. "Grown-ups have more important work to do. Who is going to run the trams? Who is going to give us lessons in history and geography? Who is going to make flowers for women's hats?"

That appeared conclusive, but John was not satisfied. Why couldn't people just live and play pick-a-back? What was the meaning of all these things? He feared this grown-up world. All the useful things appeared so useless. Only the useless things brought joy. His young mind grew confused with these thoughts.

"Well, here we are," said Dunya, dispersing the cloud that gathered in his brain.

Holding on to her he hopped along to the platform of the car. Then she caught him up and began to carry him to the hospital doorway. Even while she was carrying him the thought occurred to him that he must appear before strangers, he must answer the questions of people he had not met before. This thought frightened him. His heart beat nervously. And he knew he would have to smile whether he wanted to or not. That was one thing he learnt about Americans: they wanted you to

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smile whether you wanted to or not. It always hurt him to smile when he did not feel like smiling. It was as if he wore one of those Hallow'en masks, one with a steady, fixed grin, while underneath the flimsy, unpleasantly odorous cardboard he felt hot and uncomfortable, and sad to the point of tears. And even now at the thought of having to smile he wanted to cry. A cry struggled on its way from the heart to the throat, then lingered awhile somewhere between the throat and the eyes; sorry for so frail a smile, as it were, it reconsidered and retreated back to the heart.

Luckily, John had not much time to think. Soon the dispensary doctor was leaning over and examining the frozen foot. Dunya did the talking. She spoke quite easily, without embarrassment or hesitation. The doctor sat down and wrote out a prescription, which he gave to Dunya with instructions that John should lie in bed for at least ten days.

"But mother asked me . . ." faltered Dunya, "that I should leave him here. We can't attend to him properly at home."

"Have we a spare bed for the boy?" asked the doctor, turning to the nurse at his side.

"There is an empty one in Ward C."

"All right," said the doctor, "we'll take care of him." And before Dunya put the shawl on, the doctor patted her head in a fatherly way.

Meanwhile the nurse took charge of John, and the first thing she did was to undress him and give him a hot bath. It was the first time that he stood naked before a woman other than his mother and his whole being flushed and burnt with embarrassment. The nurse, with apparent unconcern, passed the sponge up and down his body. Then she rubbed his body with a rough towel and put him in his bed, which stood in a large room with many other beds, all filled with young patients.

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He remained in the hospital two weeks, and though he had strict orders to stay in bed all the time, his foot had sufficiently mended by the beginning of the second week to permit him to jump out of bed when the nurse was out of the room, and to play with other convalescents. Apart from his hunger—for he was dieted most of the time on bread and milk; apart from his preoccupation with his customers—what would they think of his absence?—he did not remember afterwards, in the telling of this experience, just exactly what had happened to him there, what thoughts he had thought, what fancies he had woven to relieve the intolerable monotony. It was all like a fragmentary, disjointed dream, with elusive glimpses of light, and involuntary penetrations into darkness: a thing indeed half dream, half nightmare, as formless as chaos. And that was quite natural, for in the months which had passed, his small body, notwithstanding its fundamental energy, had been taxed too much by the conditions of his life: over-work and lack of care and play and sleep. And when one is tired like that, rest seems not like rest but like dissolution, a falling apart of the particles of which one is made up. Nevertheless when the period of rest was coming to a close, an active unrest seized the boy and he was eager to be out again if only to resume his burdens. Besides, the longer he stayed in bed the more he would have to catch up with in his school tasks.

Meanwhile John's illness made its impression on the Gombarov household. The parents held councils as to the future. Semyon Gombarov bestirred himself. He left early every day and some days did not return until quite late in the evening. It was clear from his appearance on coming into the house that his mysterious visit had been fruitless, but one evening he returned with a more satisfied look on his face, which made Gombarova look up at him expectantly. The explanation was soon

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forthcoming. He had just paid a visit to a fine old Jew, who lived about seven miles out in the country, and who had five sons and a daughter working in a woollen mill situated there. From this Jew, Joseph Shapiro by name, he learnt that there were always positions to be had, if not in that mill, then in other mills situated within a radius of a few miles, thereabouts. The proprietors of these mills let cottages to families and employed as many members of the family as were capable of work. He assured Gombarov that Raya, Dunya and John would have no difficulty in finding positions.

That was then the good news which Gombarov brought home. After many councils had been held, it was decided that, unless something more propitious should offer itself, they would remove to the country that summer, where they would remain until they have had time to look around. At any rate, it would serve one good purpose: it would take John off the streets and he would no longer be exposed to the elements.

Such was the decision that awaited the boy on his return from the hospital. Curiously enough, John did not show any joy at the new prospect. On the contrary, he felt very unhappy; the thought of meeting new people and conditions and being imprisoned all day in a factory frightened him as he had not been frightened before. The thought of being taken away from school also disturbed him: he was Number One Boy, schooling was the one competition in which he excelled, it was the one thing that gave him any confidence in himself, the thought that boys who were behind him now would get ahead of him tortured him.

Even the fact that on the morning of his return to the street he found his corner occupied by another boy, who claimed the corner as his own and threatened to thrash John, who was smaller than himself, if he did not leave, did not reconcile him to the new prospect, intended

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for his good. John stuck to his corner tenaciously. Every now and then the boy came up to him and, putting a huge oily fist under John's nose, said:

"Smell this!"

The boy's fist was by no means a flower. It was an ill-smelling fist in very way, and in ordinary circumstances John would have recoiled from it. But that morning, as it happened, he was in one of those desperate moods, when, poignantly conscious of the injustice of the world, he felt that nothing mattered and, trembling all over with fear and rage, he had the impulse once or twice to spring at the boy and to fasten his fingernails on the boy's throat. Something held him back, however, from acting rashly, but let the bully only dare strike him! He held his nose close to the bully's fist and did not stir. His repressed rage and fire threatened to split him like a shell. And still he held his ground.

He had won. Whether it was that the intruder saw something in the boy's attitude which boded ill to his enterprise, or whether it was that he was discouraged by the welcome accorded John by his old customers and the material falling off in his own sales, he slunk away before the morning was far advanced and did not reappear again.

That was not the last of his encounters. Unaggressive himself, he endured everything; ever reluctant to attack, his defence was stubborn and adamant.

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CHAPTER XII

JOHN "MAKES PALS WITH KOLTCHUR"—AMERICAN PLAN

THE weeks rolled by. The Philadelphia spring, as always, came and went quickly, like a visitor who merely pushes her card under the door and has no intention to stop for a pleasant chat. But the summer, less reluctant, had sent in her luggage early, in preparation of a long stay, a too long stay. The spring flowers had already withered in Independence Square, and Chestnut Street with its hot-breathing cement sidewalks, a scorching sun beating down on them, was a flowerless hothouse. Women shoppers walked the street, their charming bare arms showing through their very filmy sleeves, and they held their coloured parasols over their heads to protect their soft skins from the over-passionate caresses of the masculine sun-god. The men walked with their coats on their arms, their straw hats in their hands, mopping their brows all the time with their handkerchiefs; their eyes strayed enviously and often with desire to the women's almost bare arms. The open trams passed by slowly and lazily, and a new passenger who had just jumped on uttered an obscene curse in his heart because all the places on the shady side were taken. Ice wagons passed by, with the water dripping, and boys fought for the small pieces when the ice was being unloaded.

In the Gombarov household, old Gombarov was explaining to Katya the phenomenon of heat, revealing the curious fact that Philadelphia was in the same degree of latitude as Madrid. Afterwards the whole fam-

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ily sat down to a lunch of bread and butter, cucumbers and tomatoes, drinking it all down with iced lemonade.

It was the middle of June. In another week the Gombarovs would be leaving town, but John was not to leave until the following week in order that he might pass the exams, which took place just before the long summer holiday. He was not less reluctant to go than before. Even the thought of that terrible night in the storm and the now suffocating days on the cement sidewalks did not reconcile him to this new migration. His one slight consolation was a set of the Britannica which he had got hold of lately under circumstances not a little peculiar.

For weeks and weeks one of the morning newspapers had been exhibiting in its window a large glass urn full of lima beans, which bore an inscription to the effect that the person making the best guess of the number of beans it contained would receive as his reward the set of the Encyclopedia Britannica displayed in the same window. The newspaper printed daily the further announcement that each of the next best five hundred guessers would be presented with a savings bank. It also printed a daily article on the inestimable value of culture, and of the culture contained in this book in particular, to every man, whether he be a doctor, lawyer, school-master, author, journalist, merchant, or school-boy; indeed, everyone ought to get in touch with culture, which was represented pictorially as a tall buxom wench wearing Greek draperies and leaning over a volume of the encyclopedia. But during certain hours of the day, when the street was at its busiest, *the real thing*—as one of the onlookers expressed himself—sat in the window and jotted down notes from one of the tomes which lay open on a reading desk. A crowd, made up mostly of men, stood looking into the window.

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"Some girl! that Koltchur!" said one of the men to his companion.

"Yes, she is a good-looker," replied the other. "I wouldn't mind marrying 'er."

"She wouldn't have a four-flusher like you—not on your tin type!"

"I'd prefer a Gibson girl myself," declared a third man, who had overheard these remarks.

Just at that moment the girl turned a page, which caused her long bare arm to stray from its voluminous sleeve.

"As for that, she ain't got nothing on my wife. My wife's got her beat to a frazzle for looks," went on the last speaker, having received no response to his first comment. "And if I 'ad her in hand I wouldn't 'ave her messing about with books either. It's not good for the queen of yer home. I guess I'd get 'er busy on those beans you see there, makin' them into soup. And I guess I'd get 'er some real clothes, and a few glad rags."

"Per'aps she's got some real clothes on, old top, eh?" remarked the first speaker.

Everybody grinned.

"I beg your pardon. So she may have. All the same I wouldn't 'ave her fussing about with books. Now my wife . . . "

"Cut that out about your wife, I ain't seen your wife," put in the second speaker.

"You ain't seen my wife? Well, that's your loss, I'm sure."

"And what's your objection to books?"

"Bless you, I ain't got no objection to books. They make as nice furniture round the house as any other. I like to see them under glass, just as I like to see a pianer so long as you don't tinkle too much on the ivories."

"What you want is not a wife but a mannikin, something to try skirts on," said the first speaker rather

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brusquely. "It's good for a woman to have kultchur. Between books and a pianer, it keeps 'em out o' mischief, my boy. Take it from me."

"That's where I beg to differ from you, old man," retorted the other. "It's them books as make girls leave home. They get new-fangled notions into their dear little heads. It's a hankering for heroes that they get, not for mutts like you and me. They want a smart 'un who'll save them from falling over from a cliff, that's the sort of notions they get from books."

"Why, that's the kind of chap usually pushes them over."

"Yes, I know that, but every girl is kind o' willing to take a chance. She wants her hero if she's got to go on the stage to find 'im. Queer critters them girls. And so I say: No kultchur for mine!"

Then the conversation gradually switched from this serious discussion of the evil effects of "Koltchur" to the beans in the window, and each one gave a guess as to the number of beans in the glass jar. Then, in spite of the dangers that "Koltchur" presented, the three men, excited by the idea of getting something for nothing, filed into the office to buy copies of the paper which contained the necessary coupon on which each guess had to be recorded.

A few doors up the street a lingerie shop window was besieged by a crowd, containing not a few men, peeping through the round perforations of a lowered blind; each perforation bore the inscription over it: "For Women Only."

John also sent in a guess as to the number of beans in that glass jar.

In due time the announcement of the winner of the prize was made. John was disappointed. His guess fell short of a couple of hundred. A few days later a smart young man called at the house and presented John

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with a dime savings bank as a reward for being among the first five hundred guessers. John, of course, did not know that every participant in the test received this prize; so he felt not a little flattered when he received his award and the man stayed for a chat and patted his head and said to Gombarova what a smart boy her son was and what a pity it was that such a clever youngster should have missed getting the Encyclopedia, the possession of which would not only ensure spiritual but financial "returns."

"Why, as soon as I saw the boy's face," exclaimed the man, "I knew at once that Koltchur was in his line. Books? I am sure he eats 'em alive. Yes, eats 'em alive!"

After making this remarkable declaration, which astonished John not a little and made Gombarova smile, the man appeared to reflect for a few moments, and then as if an idea had suddenly struck him, he began to speak again.

"I'll tell you what I can do for your boy," he said, turning to Gombarova, "you've got such a smart boy and he ought to have a set of those books. I hate to see him disappointed. I have young 'uns myself, and I'd like to see them pals with Koltchur, let me tell you. When they grow up I intend to present each one of them with a set of these books if it takes my last red cent. Now seeing that you've got such a smart boy, I've got a proposition to make to you. Our paper, anxious not to disappoint so many people, has decided to offer a limited number of sets at cost price. A limited number of sets, mind you, for those deserving of consideration. Now I have seen your boy and I'd like him to have a set. He ought to have one, if anybody. All you've got to do is to look at him to know that he's been flirting with books. He's a real smart 'un, he eats 'em alive. But he won't need to get any more books when he gets this one . . . "

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At this moment he pulled out from his pocket a set of dummy bindings and opening them out like an accordeon he held them up, stretching from the tip of one arm to the other. Then putting down the set of Encyclopedia backs on the table, where their golden-inscribed titles dazzled insinuatingly, he went on to explain:

"This book is the biggest book in the world. It contains everything. What it does not contain is not worth knowing. All the best professors and pen-pushers of the world have written for it."

Then he rattled off the number of pages it contained, the number of articles that were in it, the number of illustrations that accompanied them, the number of writers that contributed to it, the number of years that it took to put the new edition together, the number of miles the pages would cover if spread in one direction flat on the ground, and other equally bewildering facts, staggering the mind. And all this, he plainly implied, was done to satisfy the cultural cravings of one little boy by the name of John. Before the man was done John was quite convinced that this great, voluminous and all-embracing work was written for him and for no one else.

"Now, my proposition is this," said the man. "I will deliver the books now, and if your boy will put a dime a day into this savings-bank he can pay off in twenty-five months in monthly payments of three dollars."

That was a lot of money, as desirable as the books seemed.

"Come for your answer tomorrow," said Gombarova. "We must think it over before we go into it."

"All right," said the man, rising to go, "only mind, don't delay too long. We've got a limited number of sets only, and they are going like hot cakes."

After consultation with Gombarov it was decided to take the books. The truth was that in his heart Gombarov welcomed the idea as much for his own sake as for

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John's. And so John suddenly became the nominal possessor of a great library, which had at least one assiduous reader—his stepfather. John had previously saved up three dollars. This he used as an initial payment on the books, but from the day the books arrived he was allowed a dime a day out of his earnings to drop into the savings-bank.

A week later the family left for the country to begin their new life, but John stopped in town a week longer to pass his exams. He slept every night on the floor of the dark corridor adjoining the rooms the Gombarovs had just quitted, and he got his meals from a good woman in the house with whom his mother had made an arrangement. In a few days, just as he began to get accustomed to this manner of living, he began to receive frantic letters from home, urging him not to wait for his exams, but to come at once, as his mother was much alarmed on his account.

Reluctantly he acquiesced, and on the day following his arrival at Shoddy Hill he was appointed a bobbin-boy at the Shoddy Mills. His work consisted in gathering up the discarded bobbins at the looms into a large basket, which he afterwards shouldered and carried up three flights of stairs to the rooms which contained the "spinning mules." He did this all day. His hours were from seven in the morning to six in the evening. His wages were three dollars a week, and as many insults as he could stand from the Irish boys, who, coming of an oppressed race, took a delight, when the chance offered of oppressing others, less fortunate than themselves.

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CHAPTER XIII

TWO LONG YEARS KILLED IN ONE CHAPTER—CURIOUS ADVENTURES, MOSTLY OF THE SOUL

ONCE more John Gombarov and his friend were sitting in Café Royal. At Douglass's own suggestion, Gombarov was telling him of Vanya's life in the country and at the mill, pausing by the way to make his customary Gombarovian reflections on life. Throughout the narrative he never ceased to refer to Vanya in the third person; to an outsider he surely would have given the impression that he was speaking of someone else's childhood, not his own.

Gombarov no sooner began to talk than he quite suddenly bent his head and begged his friend in a whisper to do the same quickly. After a few moments had elapsed Gombarov raised his head again, and once more faced Douglass.

"It was Tobias Bagg who just passed us. I was afraid he would see us, and sit down with us. He has a way of treating you to drinks, yes even to a lavish dinner, and then imagines that he may treat himself to one or two of your ideas. I am glad you are a painter, Douglass, not a writer. If you were a writer, I should be afraid to say a word to you. We are a race of thieves, and every moment of our lives, when we are not asleep, is spent in trying to extract something from our fellows. Well, they say 'there's honor among thieves.' But I often wonder whether there is a shred of honor among writers. A plague upon them all! But this fellow Bagg is particu-

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larly obvious. Then there is the race of modern novelists. Talk of parasites. There's Thomas Lampton's last novel, 'The Vagrant'. I haven't read the book myself, but everyone tells me that there's hardly a character in Café Royal who is not in it. The book is evidently full of rogues, yet curiously enough everyone in it feels flattered at having attracted the attention of so distinguished a personage. You would think that there would be a dozen people rushing to punch the author's head; but no, this is an age of advertisement, and nothing is considered so depreciatory as being ignored."

"But now," said Gombarov, resuming his narrative, about Vanya, "we come to one of those gaps in life hard to describe, two long years in a boy's life, in which, apart from a few isolated incidents, nothing apparently happens of any importance. It was as if, walking through a dense wood, you had come upon a tangle of bushes which barred your progress, caught you in their thorny embrace if you tried to make your way. Vanya fought in it, the whole Gombarov family fought in it, they scratched themselves, wore themselves out struggling, nothing happened. At least, nothing *seemed* to happen.

"The Gombarovs," he went on—Douglas had not yet got over his astonishment at his friend's cool detached way of speaking of his family in the third person—"The Gombarovs soon found that they were unable to live on the small wretched earnings of Raya, Dunya and John, and so, after some deliberation, it was decided that Mrs. Gombarov herself should take a job in the factory. This she did cheerfully enough, and one might have seen her every morning at six-thirty, accompanied by her three children, walking along the little stream, at the distant bend of which was situated the factory. One might have seen the same little procession wending its way home at

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six-thirty in the evening. At home a supper awaited them, prepared by old Gombarov himself—"

"My God! My God!" broke in Douglass at this point. His face expressed utter amazement. "Is it possible? Is it possible? How are the mighty fallen!"

Gombarov's nonchalant face smiled a little smile, which seemed to say: "That's nothing! Be prepared for what is coming." Then his face hardened again, but his heart fought with it for mastery. Gombarov however did not betray himself. His eyes were still, his lips were the only part of him that moved, his words came measured, in monotone. It was as if not a live man were speaking but a statue. Quite suddenly the truth dawned upon Douglass: Gombarov was speaking in that distant detached way of his own childhood and the life of the Gombarovs, keeping up the fable of the third person, in order to avoid the sense of intimacy, in order to be able to speak of the matter at all. His plasticity was a dyke which prevented a too emotional outburst, kept back the tears which must have raged and seethed in his breast. With this the thought came to Douglass that he beheld a man who gave the lie to the prevalent idea that man and artist could not be contained in one person. So successfully, he thought, were the two merged in Gombarov that it was hard to tell where one ended and the other began.

"Vanya's stepfather had other occupations," resumed Gombarov. "Among other things he constructed with his own hands a new style of incubator, and began to breed chickens. These he attended with the help of his younger children. But the great subject which held his attention was altogether a new one. This time he had outlined a project for a colossal book. Its theme was to be the comparative cultures of the world from ancient times until ours, and was to include every aspect of the theme, whether religion, politics, ethics, jurisprudence,

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art or literature. That was ostensibly the object of his proposed book, but at the back of his mind was the idea that Oriental culture was as superior to the European as Jewish culture was superior to the other Oriental cultures. He had a considerable library of books in several languages which he had brought over with him from Russia, to which he had added not a few since his arrival. He pored over these in his leisure time, and marked them with profuse marginal notes. In addition to this he used to read the newspapers, and when he ran across some enlightening item on the life and thought of the day, he would cut it out and put it away carefully among his notes. There were extraordinary bits among these. It might have been about a woman who had divorced her husband because he made a noise eating soup,—'that could happen only among the *goyim*' (Gentiles) he would say; it might have been some notorious case in which a Jewish usurer was concerned—'in what way,' he would remark, 'is usury worse than the Gentile invention of watered stock with its hundred per cent dividends for its rascally promoters? In what way are the trust kings' profits any more legitimate? But it seems that usury becomes legitimate when it is done on a large scale and under another name.' Or it might have been a new case of blood accusation in Russia. 'What should the Jews want Christian blood in their *matzoth*, when it isn't *kosher?*' In the midst of these perusals of the newspaper he would give a sudden chuckle or laugh—well, they say Heine did the same when on his mattress grave he was writing his book on the Hohenzollerns, which unfortunately never saw the light of day."

"What a man!" exclaimed Douglass, "how you must all have hated him."

"Yes, that is quite true, we all hated him for not being like other fathers." It was the first time that Gombarov used "we," but he quickly corrected himself. "How

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they all did hate him! I told you about the suppers he used to prepare. These usually consisted of some rice boiled with a bone. As, sometimes the bone was lacking, the result was an almost tasteless mixture. Vanya was the first to revolt. One evening when he returned home from a long day's work, and the soup was placed before him, rather more thin and watery than usual, he tasted it, and, putting down the spoon, made a wry face. Something struggled within him. He was afraid he would burst if he did not say something. All his feelings surged towards his throat. He did not care what happened. At last he spoke:

"'I am sick of this stuff!'

"A quiet fell upon the table. Every one stopped eating, in expectation of something. Gombarova was rather more frightened than the rest. Vanya sat in a kind of stupor, pale. Gombarov glared across the table at him, with blazing eyes. Presently his words clove the storm-laden atmosphere like lightning:

"'If you don't like that fine dish, then don't eat it.'

"Vanya pushed the plate away from him. Then he rose from his place, got as far as the door, and shouted:

"'Go to hell!'

"Then, slamming the door, he walked out.

"Old Gombarov was in a rage. 'He shall leave the house, and at once!' he cried.

"In the meantime Vanya walked slowly into the cool of the woods, which were near by, and began to think hard. He knew what his stepfather would say, and he tried to come to a decision. If it came to the worst he would go back to town, sell papers once more, and sleep in the old corridor as he did during the week of his lonely stay before. It never occurred to him that the rooms to which the corridor was attached might be let by now. And he was a little afraid. Besides, his mother would cry her eyes out. He was afraid for himself, and

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he was sorry for his mother. He did not care whether he saw his stepfather again or not. He felt a thousand years old and he was sick of life. He thought of other children and envied them their fathers. And again, and again, he asked himself the question: Why did he feel so different from other children? Was it his stepfather's fault, or was the fault in himself? But whether it was one or the other, it led to the same thought: he wished he were dead.

"While he was in the midst of these thoughts, he heard rapid footsteps coming nearer; he knew that his mother had sent for him, he knew that she would. He wanted very much to be sent for, at the same time he would pretend that he did not want to come. Perhaps he was like other children in this respect. He also knew that Dunya would be chosen for this task. Dunya had a way about her, even old Gombarov liked her better than he did his own children.

"Well, Dunya came up presently. Without saying a word she, first of all, wiped his tears from his eyes, with her handkerchief.

" 'Come, come,' she said, 'you've made mother cry.'

" 'I don't care,' he replied petulantly, 'I hate him, and I'm going to run away from home.'

" 'We all hate him, but remember,' she said, ignoring his threat, 'you made mother cry.' But two years older than he, she was a little woman compared to him, and had learnt that in the case of the other sex you had to play on their weakness rather than their strength. She knew that he was stubborn but that his heart always melted at the sight of tears, a fact that other women were to take advantage of in the coming years with less scruple, and worse intention.

"He, on his part, was wrapt in the thought: Why can't one hurt some one whom one wants to hurt, without hurting another whom one does not want to hurt? Why

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could not one do anything without hurting so many other people? He already had seen how his stepfather's life was affecting the lives of all of them. He realized no less how his own action of that evening affected the peace of the family. For an instant or two he felt a curious satisfaction at this. After all, he was not without some power. But as soon as he thought of their tears, his weakness prevailed, and he clenched his teeth together to keep from crying. He stopped before a young birch, and clung to it. His arms around it, he stretched himself into a rigid posture, remaining thus a long time. He was now a young sapling, and his young heart began to tighten into a knot. Dunya stood there, one hand on his shoulder, the other patting his head.

" 'Come, come,' she said coaxingly, 'mother is waiting for you.'

"Somewhat unwillingly he released his hold of the tree, and began to walk slowly homewards, Dunya's arm around him. Why could not people be as happy as in a fairy tale? Was his stepfather the terrible ogre who stood in their way? Then the insinuating thought came to him: he was a little sorry for his stepfather too. Why should he feel sorry for him? That was hard to say, unless it was that he was so sorry for everyone, and such a flood of pity welled in his heart, that it could not help but take in his father also. Still, he was proud and stubborn, and he would not admit to anyone in the world that he was sorry. For all his pity, that knot remained, and not all the rapid waters of pity could dissolve or dislodge it. Only in later years he realized that it was precisely this detestable little knot that kept him afloat as he was borne along on the torrent of life, and enabled him to meet all the misfortunes he was yet to endure.

"His mother was waiting for him somewhat away from the house. Without saying a word, she snatched

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him by the hand, and led him into the house by the back way. As the house stood on the slope of a hill, and as the back of the house was at the upper end of it, Vanya found himself in the children's bedroom, just over the dining room. Through a hole in the floor he could hear his stepfather raging in the room below.

" 'Things have come to a pretty pass when children no longer respect their parents. There's Western culture for you!'

"John's stepfather had got into that comfortable frame of mind when he was ready to saddle every new misfortune on the sufficiently strong back of Western culture. Like every man who possessed a sense of humour, he had at least one subject which was totally immune to it. His resentment against small innocent Vanya had turned for the while on a more formidable target.

" 'What can you think of a race which respects a prophet who says that "parents are their children's first enemies"?'

"John's ear, glued to the hole in the floor, was like the open fertile ground ready to receive the seed. That last remark kept turning over in the boy's young brain, and not exactly in a way that would have pleased his stepfather. His as yet inarticulate feeling struggled for expression; could it have expressed itself at the moment it would have said: 'Then there is someone on my side, after all.' Not that he had gathered the full profundity of Stendhal's *mot*. His grievance, against them, his parents, was quite simple. He felt himself denied all those needs which every child instinctively feels as his natural right: nourishing food, sleep, sunlight, play, affection; and when these are denied a child he is sure to turn upon the nearest authors of his misfortunes. His stepfather's quotation gave him a vague and yet definite pleasure. The strength of this feeling lay indeed in its vagueness, for nothing has such hold of us as the thoughts and feel-

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ings whose roots are planted to wholly reveal their hold. So there was someone after all, somewhere, who understood him; and he was a stranger, he did not even know his name. That was the important fact. Did he then hate his mother? No, he pitied her as he pitied himself, as he pitied the others. She too was a helpless child in his hands. Still, he was critical. Why had she allowed this man to waste the funds entrusted by his father and intended partly for his, Raya's and Dunya's education? To make matters worse, he saw his mother, Raya and Dunya and himself all working to keep his stepfather and his half-brothers and sisters alive. He was not too young to know that here was a pretty state of affairs! The injustice of it held his heart as in a vise. In his sulky moments he was resentful, he felt that he bore his mother a grudge for marrying his stepfather.

"The real wonder was that there was any feeling left at all in the boy. Perhaps, apart from his too large store of pity, which is love in the abstract, and transcendent—because it takes in all things, including relatives who happen to be in physical proximity—Vanya had actually no real personal affection, at any rate at the time, for his mother. After all, personal affection is not so much a matter of blood. And the proof of this was that Vanya's own father, removed at the time five thousand miles in the matter of space and ten years in the matter of time, aroused no emotion in Vanya, or even in his sisters, except perhaps curiosity, and occasionally a mood of abstract resentment. Blood may be thicker than water, but the foolishness of some proverb makers is surely thicker than treacle. Well, to my way of thinking, that 'Honour thy father and mother' commandment was a special tribal invention devised for the protection of parents from the natural wrath of their children. The original State was the family, with the patriarchal father

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as its head. Children are quick to feel that their parents have failed them, and it is natural that they should be provoked to rebellion not unlike the rebellion of a people against an unworthy king. At all events, Vanya was miserable as a child, because justice, although he did not know it, was already a passion with him, and his equally passionate pity was in clash with it. At odd moments he had already begun to realize that he had a battle with three adversaries: the world, his family, and himself. That was the great trouble with him: he loved the world and he hated it, he loved his family and he hated it, he loved himself and he hated himself.

"Lying there with his ear to the floor, John's heart now hardened into a knot, now relaxed into a fluid warmth, as if blood were slowly oozing from a piece of hemp rope. A warmth filled him to the very tips of his toes, as upon that night when he fell and lay in the snow, and he began to sob softly, calling upon God and the invisible angels to come and help him. He heard no one come in, but suddenly felt some one touch his shoulder.

" 'Vanya darling, John darling,' he heard his mother's voice, 'I've brought you something.'

"Vanya did not stir. He was too sad, and overcome with the sense of his struggle. Besides, he wanted to be coaxed.

" 'Here, John darling,' repeated his mother, 'I've got something very nice for you.'

"After several refusals, during which his mother kept stroking his hair, he raised his head and opened his eyes. He found himself gazing at a piece of steak, well smothered in onions, the sudden smell of which took his palate and nostrils by storm. He felt quite hungry: thus does nature reassert itself over the nobler passions. Nevertheless he did not enjoy his meal as he might have done. With every bite came the realization: his mother

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had gone out to borrow this piece of meat from a neighbour; again, he was the only one, the others had done without it. His mother, quick to see his reluctance, urged him to eat it quickly:

"'If Gombarov knew,' she said, 'he would throw this out of the window.'

"Gombarova had to use all her tact to soothe one and the other, to bring about a truce between them. She knew that her lord and master was quite capable of sending Vanya away from home. She resorted to an old weapon: the intervention of the new unborn . . . "

Douglass was on the point of interrupting in order to express his indignation against old Gombarov's careless tendency to procreate children at other people's expense, but subsided at a gesture on the part of the speaker, who went on:

"Yes, it was not long before Gombarova had to stop work. Another child was born to her—a little girl, who was named Margaret, an unusual name in the family, in that it was a concession to the other children's demand for Americanization. The father's suggestion was overruled: he wanted to name her Naomi. John was now approaching his fifteenth year, he was old enough to understand that every newcomer meant so much extra ballast for him, Raya and Dunya to bear, an extra fetter keeping them in subjection, and he was not without certain bitterness against his stepfather and his mother, which, however, did not prevent pleasant relations between him and the new little one.

"John's education during those two years had been almost wholly neglected. He had hardly looked into a book. The Encyclopedia was a bore; he soon realized that he had bought it chiefly for his stepfather's use; owing to the irregularity of his payments the company more than once threatened to take away the books. And being too far away from the city, he was unable to make

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use of the free library; he looked back on his town days, when he devoured Dumas and Verne, with intense regret. His knowledge of English was still limited. His thoughts were slow, he spoke in stammers, especially with strangers; and one spring day, feeling ill and feverish, he made the ludicrous mistake of asking for a day off because he had the spring fever!

"It is true his relations with the boys had somewhat improved, but this was largely due to his entering into combats with them with fists. He got bested as often as he bested others. He never had any joy in this, and always fought unwillingly. But when it came to wrestling, much to his own surprise he could handle any boy his size. What gained him, however, the respect of the boys was his part in the football games they played during the lunch hour. They soon discovered that when the ball was passed to him he was always sure to advance it some distance. There was always excitement among the onlookers when he was in the game. They cried: 'Pass the ball to Simon,' or 'Watch Simon,' or 'Watch South Street'! Both these references were, as you may guess, to the fact that he was a Jew. South Street was the chief street in the Philadelphia ghetto. But these names no longer had the sting with which they were at first invested. For the boys had a tenderness for his prowess. On one occasion, when the boss was away, the working men goaded him into fighting a Jewish boy. Now, that was something like fun for them! To see a Gentile pummeling a Jew was a natural and desirable thing; to see a Jew pummeling a Gentile was both unnatural and undesirable; to see a Jew pummeling a Jew presented the unusual combination of being unnatural and highly desirable. The astonishing contest lasted a full hour, and would have lasted longer but for the fact that the lookout near the window reported the approach of the foreman. The reason for the battle lasting so long was

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curious. After ten minutes of fierce fighting, which highly delighted the crowd, both gladiators drew blood. Although neither was very much hurt, and Vanya had slightly the best of it, being Jews, the sight of blood was fatal to both. Goaded on by the crowd, who aroused their pride, they went on fighting, but only with a half heart, each hitting the other perfunctory blows, each showing on his face a perfunctory and unchanging smile, which revealed neither hate nor anger, if anything pity for one another and the sense of performing an unpleasant and unnecessary duty.

"But there is a conscience in individuals if there is none in a crowd, for not long afterwards an Irish boy fell ill, and it soon became known in the factory that in the delirium of typhus he raved most about the injustice done to John."

There were many other experiences, during those two years' stay at Shoddy Hill, concerning which John Gombarov told Douglass. John's tribulations did not stop with his battle with his stepfather's growing family, or with the outer world and all its pitiless circumstances. His greatest battle, only beginning, was with himself, or rather with that potent part of himself which is natural to every healthy boy, and which the virtuous eunuchs of our civilization either regard with envy or are not in a position to understand.

"How can a child," observed John Gombarov, "be understood in our puritanic civilization, composed chiefly of ascetics, nay-sayers, self-deniers, voluptuaries of the spirit, vegetarians, Savanorolians, Christian scientists, non-conformists, raucous-voiced hymn-singers, flesh-despisers, self-sacrificers, other-sacrificers, prohibitionists, joy-haters, sun-haters, live-mummy lovers, sleep-aloners, bread-and-water repasters, obsessionists, abnegators, virgin-worshippers, eye-shutters . . . . . "

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"Enough!" laughed Douglass, "I know the list. Even in a happier age than this, our Shakespeare addressed himself to these through Sir Toby's mouth: 'Doth thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' "

"Yes, that's just it. They won't enjoy life themselves, and they won't let others enjoy it. The terrible thing about it is that their own peculiar mania has become an obsession with them. Look at the vegetarians. They get into a state where their one ambition is to eat vegetables! I have seen vegetarian parents sacrifice their Isaacs to the god of vegetables. It is true, you cannot develop much passion on carrot stews and peasoup. Anaemia is the mother of virtue, but is not a virtue in itself. But I am digressing. I was beginning to tell you about Vanya, and the awakening of the man in him."

Vanya's knowledge of sex, Gombarov went on to say, consisted first of all of what he had learned more or less perfunctorily from his Hebrew lessons—of Adam's sin, of Onan's sin, of the sin of Lot's daughters, of the sin of Ham in looking upon the nakedness of his father; secondly, he grew familiar with the logical sequence of those well-known terms with which the Book is so generously seasoned: the *knowing,* the conceiving, and the begetting; thirdly, there was the profane talk of the boys and girls which went on without cease in the factory, things he could not help but hear; fourthly, there were the writings and the drawings he saw marked up on the walls of the city and the village and in the factory itself; fifthly, there were his own feelings, strange to him then and inexplicable, vague broodings and clear imaginings, mental picturings of feminine nakedness, the importunity of his shameful desire upon seeing a woman or a girl sitting cross-legged to throw himself down on the carpet and to watch stealthily the contour of

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her leg, the not less shameful allurement of a bit of exposed lace on a feminine under-garment, the intense mystery of it all aroused his curiosity to an extent that quite eclipsed his shame; sixthly, he once saw . . . but it is better not to tell you what he saw. Yet he was very shy, and the presence of a girl or woman, not of his own family, embarrassed him, and made him blush, which caused his sisters to laugh at him and to tease him. Sometimes they would bring in a girl of their acquaintance, who, seeing the boy's shyness and embarrassment, would act very forwardly, after the manner of women, and would seat herself in seductive poses; all his feelings, all his shame, would be aroused, he would blush and tremble most violently; he wished he had the courage to approach this girl, lay hands on her, kiss her, play games with her, chase her round a tree, he wanted to hear her laugh and scream, to see her skirts in a rumpus as she ran from him. He felt an intense shame at his own shame, for he had seen other boys act boldly and almost unconcernedly in similar circumstances, and he envied them. He stood there flushing, not daring to approach his tormentor. His stepfather, passing through the room, sized up the situation and said, laughing, to the boy: "Kiss her!" This only all the more embarrassed him. The girl laughed at him. But, like most members of her sex, young as she was, she was resourceful.

"Come," she said, "I'll wrestle you."

He hesitated.

"You are afraid," she taunted him, "you know I am stronger than you."

"You are afraid," joined in Dunya.

"I am not," asserted John, gathering courage. "I'll show you who is stronger."

He made a rush for the girl. His arms grimly around her waist, there was a tussle. Her arms around his shoulders, she fought vigorously, uttering cries of smoth-

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ered laughter. Determined to best her, he quite forgot her sex, and he seized her where it was most convenient, wherever his hands happened to fall, as if she were a boy. Receiving more than she bargained for, she suddenly put out her leg, and tripped him up. Falling, he carried her with him, and she fell on top of him. He was struggling under her, trying to extricate himself, when he suddenly became conscious of her flushed face, her dishevelled hair, the closeness of her body. At the same moment he heard her gasp: "You are not at all nice."

His own realization and this sudden reminder left him helpless. Shame and desire, as bitter as they were sweet, as vague as they were definite, wrestled in him for ascendancy; he let her go.

She jumped up quickly. He watched her shaking herself, he watched her arrange her clothes and her hair.

"You were unfair," he cried, rising also. "You tripped me up."

"I didn't!" she exclaimed. "I'm stronger than you."

He still felt ashamed and flushed, and he was astonished at how quickly she recovered her composure, and at the bold and convinced tone of her denial.

When he recalled the episode in later years, and his words to the girl and her reply to his words, it seemed to him as if it were all some ancient and eternal refrain, which began with Adam and Eve, when confronted by God after the fatal apple episode, and which recurred again and again in his life, as in other lives, not unlike the recurring pattern on a serpent's back.

" 'You were unfair, and you tripped me up!'—there you have the ripe tenor of the eternal masculine," John Gombarov would say. 'No, I did not, I am stronger than you!'—there's your natural soprano part in this universal duet. Frail woman, to combat man's honesty and superior strength, has invented a kind of mental jiujitsu, which sometimes takes the form of tears, some-

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times subtlety, sometimes downright lying, but usually all three combined. Who knows whether Eve had not libelled the serpent, twisted the serpent's words, or perhaps even invented the whole tale. After all, if the serpent was as subtle as the Book says, he wouldn't have been so foolish as to divulge an important diplomatic secret to a woman and risk losing his head—I mean his feet—for it, and having to creep on his belly all his life."

"You are a misogynist," protested Douglass. "You must admit there are good women, even ideal women."

"Now don't stand up on your hind legs," said Gombarov trying to mollify his friend. "I think I am in love myself. Good women there undoubtedly are; as for ideal women, they exist chiefly in men's minds. The ideal woman is born in a young man's fancy, she dies in an old man's dying mind. When a man seeks out an object for his affection it is to attach her, and adorn her, with all the charms and virtues preconceived and existent in his mind, but rarely is man so fortunate as to find a woman upon whom these will fit like a well-made garment, as upon the 'admired Miranda':

'.....for several virtues
Have I liked several women; never any
With so full soul, but some defect in her
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed,
And put it to the foils: but you, O you,
So perfect and so peerless, are created
Of every creature's best!'

And Miranda was an invented creature of a great man's last work! It is this creature living at the back of every man's mind who has made more cynics in this world than any other thing. But the poet, denied his desire in life, has poured himself into his plays and poems,

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the sculptor into his statues, the painter into his pictures. If men were granted their desire there would be no art. For dreams and art are always the expression of a man's desire. That wall of Del Sarto's was left bare in heaven because Del Sarto had had his desire on earth."

In his characteristic manner Gombarov brought the subject back to John.

"For it is a curious thing," he went on, "even John, young though he was, sensual though he was—perhaps because he was young and sensual—had, together with his sensual imaginings, already begun to have glimmerings, as yet vague, of what you, as a painter, would call the 'ideal woman.' In a strange way, she appeared to him, by day and by night, in dream and in day dream, as out of clouds of mist, clearly outlined yet indefinable, pale and lovely, curiously sensual yet refined, like Nadezhda Vassilyevna, the governess he remembered from his early childhood days in that now dreamlike house bordering on a fairy wood. Why should this creature have appeared to him, by what process of becoming did she come to rise out of the depths of his consciousness as Aphrodite rose from the sea? Was she the natural product of an unconscious evolving of seeds planted on the fertile and impressionable soil of his being by his reading of fairy princesses and of heroines of fiction, the natural flower of gestating fancy? Or was she some persistent hereditary memory come down through the generations, choosing him to pause in, to gather herself in, to concentrate her deliberate force before she should have again resumed her tireless, endless journey? Or was she the ultimate and flawless mask of feminine perfection come to him because his sensitiveness had evoked her, called her to him, commanded her to his presence in order that he might find relief from his every-day life, every-day troubles? Or was she come to combat that

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other creature, the obscene, sensual one, whose visitations were becoming more frequent and more troublesome? It was hard to tell, even looking backward, by what unconscionable processes, by what manner of incantation, by what cunning mystery, she came, why and whence she came, and whither she went."

A strange thing happened one night. He lay on his mattress on the floor and could not sleep. It was a moonlit night, and as the Gombarovs could not afford blinds, the full moon poured in her light in a passionate flow into the room. The objects in the room looked mysterious; the pale-faced sleepers, Raya and Dunya and Absalom, appeared like beings of another world. John's body, tired from the day's work, turned from side to side, while his mind, alive with the turmoil of the day's events, felt as acutely restless in all that quiet enchantment, reminiscent of death, as an active darting fish in the still, clear waters of a bewitched lake. That very day that he had wrestled with the little minx, his sister's friend, and now once more she appeared to him, as at the moment when he released her, with flushed face and dishevelled hair, her clothes in sweet disorder; she looked at him with a reproach she did not mean, and she said to him: "You are not at all nice." What did she mean by it? He knew, or rather he felt, that she meant something by it. Had she then guessed his thoughts? How could he help his thoughts? He knew he was evil to want to peep through a key-hole, to want to see her as she looked before retiring at night; to want to hide behind the bushes as she took a dip in the swimming pond—none were so evil as he in this world. But whether evil or not, his thoughts took no heed of his reflections; with reckless disregard of moral precepts and proprieties, they undressed her, pushed her forward, still flushing and dishevelled, at first with a shame-faced reluctance, gradually

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developing into a flaunting forwardness . . . For a moment he gave himself up riotously to the vision . . . .

Surely none were so evil as he in the whole world.

He tried not to think . . . . . to turn his thoughts elsewhere. Then she, the Other, came to him, pale and tranquil like the moonlight, a vision of his governess Nadezhda Vassilyevna, playing with soothing fingers through his hair. Nadezhda Vassilyevna was dead, he knew she was dead; they had heard of her, she had died of consumption among the revolutionaries in Switzerland; but she had not died for him. It was her, not the flaunting one, he loved. She looked at him with her old quiet smile . . . . The oval of her face was clearly outlined, as were the high curved eye-brows, her skin was white, her blue-grey eyes clear, and there was her quiet old smile. Then he saw her smile change. Something alien to them had suddenly crept into her eyes. Yet this something was familiar to him. Physically too the vision was changing. All of a sudden he realized: she was metamorphosing, merging in the other. He could not understand how it happened. The vision vanished.

Half dreaming, he raised himself up with a start. He rubbed his eyes and looked around the room. The vision still obsessed him. He looked around at the sleepers, lying supinely and but thinly or half covered owing to the warmth. Quite near by slept Dunya. The moonlight lay a kind of pale green-white on her bare outstretched arms and upon her face. Her loose black locks lay carelessly on the pillow and on her bosom. The only features of her face visible were the strongly marked dark eyebrows and rather more faintly the fine line of her mouth, and seeing it he felt pity for her, his favourite sister, whom as yet unconsciously perhaps he loved more than any being on earth. Nevertheless, in the ghostly glare of that full unearthly moonlight, the spirit of his strange unrest still upon him, she did not seem to

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him like Dunya, but like a vision of feminine beauty differing only in texture and degree from his earlier visions of the night. His heart beat fast as thoughts came to him, urging and compelling thoughts, lashed on in their turn by a most fearful curiosity.

With trembling heart, fearful of discovery, he crept over to where she lay, and for some moments, leaning on his elbow, looked into her face.

"Dunya," he called in a low voice, wishing to make sure that she was asleep.

There was no answer.

Slowly and lightly he lifted the cover from her, and gazed at her avidly in the moonlight. He gazed fascinated at her whiteness and her outlines, with no other desire than to gaze. He was trembling all over and his heart beat fearfully, yet he could not tear himself away from the vision, the exact nature of whose attraction he could not explain.

Dare he light a candle, he thought to himself, if only for one little moment, the better to see than by the light the moon vouchsafed him? Fear of discovery made him hesitate, but only for a moment; forces stronger than fear were at work. He reached out for the candle and matches on the window-sill, and quietly lighting the candle held it over Dunya. The flame cast a ruddy glare, gave life to the vision. The candle in his trembling hand flickered, causing the great spot of light to waver with a mysterious agitation on Dunya's white body. Presently, he saw her face stir slightly, and he blew out the candle; he heard her sigh, then mutter something; she shifted her arms, and her hands pressed her bosom. Was she dreaming? . . . . he wondered. He held his breath, and after a little while, seeing that she kept still, he cautiously drew the cover over her, and crept back to his mattress. Throwing himself down upon it, he buried his head in the pillow, clutching at it

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convulsively and trying to stifle his sobs. He did not know why he was sobbing. But it relieved him to cry. Afterward he drew the bed-cover over his head, and soon lapsed into unconsciousness . . .

Douglass was naturally astonished when Gombarov told him of that episode of John's adolescence, that extraordinary, almost clairvoyant image of the awakening of sex. And though he knew that Gombarov, like most Russians he met, was frank, yet he had not expected such an intimate revelation. Douglass was the first to break the short silence that followed the recounting of the incident:

"The tale you have told me might, in its essence, have been taken from Greek mythology. It might be made as significant as the classic tale of Cupid and Psyche. I should say it would be rather a difficult thing to treat in a modern novel. People nowadays do not understand these things. And what they do not understand annoys them, if it doesn't actually shock them."

"I for one," said Gombarov, "cannot see how the normal excesses of human minds can be controlled except by normal living. Normal mental excesses come from abnormal physical suppressions. Leading narrow suppressed lives, men quarrel with the heedless prodigality of nature. Life is wine, not vinegar. After all, John's thought as a boy, and all his misery, rose not from morbidity, but from excess of normality. Because this naturalness was suppressed by a hard, joyless, altogether unreasonable civilization, to which, by reason of his early bringing up in the Russian woods, he had not become accustomed, his spirit revolted. There was no relief, no outlet for his natural life. Something deep within him sought egress, and that was the very essence of life. If I ever write a novel, it won't deal with photographic likenesses of men, but with men's innermost

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feelings and thoughts. Men and women shall stand exposed to the world as they are to themselves. They shall parade before the reader's eyes as thoughts incarnate, in all their true relation to one another. I would try to present their real being, their very essence, the texture of their thoughts. I would try to reduce their seeming complexity to unutterable simplicity. For men at bottom are simple and have common desires. Unfortunately most of our novelists fall in with our civilization and, if anything, only help to entangle our lives into ugly knots, instead of untying them. Let us burrow our way out of our miserable darkness and not further into it."

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CHAPTER XIV

HOW A TREE HELPED TO MAKE A TURNING POINT IN THE GOMBAROVS' LIVES

WITH Gombarova at home again, after giving birth to Margaret—and Margaret was an extra mouth to feed, if as yet a little one—the Gombarovs found it hard to get along. It was true that Raya and Dunya, paid by piecework, had slowly increased their earnings; John also had had two promotions, one from bobbin boy to piecer on "spinning-mule," the other to runner of "spinning-mule," a formidable device of some four or five hundred spindles which moved in and out on wheels the whole length of the long room and transformed raw wool or cotton into thread. By the first promotion he got a raise of fifty cents; by the second, which was a sort of coming of age, for it gave him a man's job, he got another fifty cents; he was now getting four dollars a week for work at which a man usually got from eight to ten dollars a week.

" 'Suffer little children to come unto me', is the favourite writing over the door of modern industry," said John Gombarov, in telling of the experience many years afterward.

What was to be done? To make matters worse, the employés of the Shoddy Mills were under compulsion to buy their food, coal, kindling and other household supplies from the company stores, a "vicious circle" de-

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vice, characteristic of our civilization, invented to divert the moneys received by workers to their fountain-head.

Many of the employés, especially Russians, would now and then save a few pennies by going to the neighbouring woods at dusk to gather kindling; after a storm there was some chance of picking up a broken young tree, or the severed limb of an old one. Old Gombarov was very fond of going out on these expeditions, and it was his habit to fetch the most formidable victim he could find, calling if need be upon John's help. He grew more and more ambitious in this respect—he had never been fond of doing things by halves—until one day he achieved the climax with most startling consequences.

Owing to low supplies of raw wool, John was idle that day. It occurred to old Gombarov that he might use this fact to advantage.

"Let's go and get some wood," he said to John.

John, who did not know what to do with himself, agreed willingly.

Taking a large saw and an axe, they went out. It was a grey drizzly day. The air was warm, and there was a hint of thunder. No one was about. The population was mostly at work in the mills.

They walked a little while along the narrow path, the fallen leaves crunching under their feet. Then Gombarov suddenly swerved aside, plunged in among the bushes, John following. Gombarov walked on as if towards a fixed spot. Emerging on the other side of the bushes, he walked a little way farther, then quite suddenly stopped. They stood before a huge tree, an old poplar; John thought it was the biggest tree in the wood.

"You are not going to cut that tree down, are you?" asked John, in amazement.

"Why not?" asked his stepfather. "Men don't fish for minnows when they can catch cod."

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To John there appeared to be something appalling in the idea of cutting this tree down. It was so tall and old and huge, he and his stepfather were so little. He felt unwilling and afraid, but fascinated by the thought as well. Apart from this, he thought: this wood probably belonged to someone—might they not get into trouble for cutting such a tree down? And he grew horribly afraid at the thought, even more than at the other.

His stepfather, as if he had guessed his thoughts, merely said:

"Young trees grow into old trees, it is better to bring this old fellow down than a lot of young ones. It will save us a lot of trouble. This chap ought to last us several months."

They took no heed of the growing drizzle, threw their coats off, and got to work. They were soon perspiring, and took short rests. The little saw-dust heap grew and grew. Yet there still was much left to saw. It was hard to tell afterwards how long it took them to do the job, but it surely seemed incredibly long.

When they came near the end, John thought: Now the tree will surely fall. So frail appeared the hold it had on the stump, and on dear life. After another five minutes, John thought: another moment and it would fall. And he began to prepare to run, not knowing which way it would fall. But it still lived on. John's heart trembled with fear and expectancy. The tree tilted just slightly; at the place where the saw sundered it in two, the parting grew barely wider. There was a slight crackle, a slight groan, as the saw cut into the last sinews, and still the tree stood, towered in its aged pride. At last there came the last crackle, followed by a prolonged groan; the tree shook, trembled, almost reeled, like a powerful drunken man wishing to right himself, to prevent himself from falling; at least it appeared so to

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John, who, together with his stepfather, began to make a retreat, watching at the same time the slow reluctant fall of the giant; there was a crash, lasting for some moments, as of thunder; so loud it was, that John felt glad that there was rain; if anyone heard it, they would surely think it was thunder.

Stepfather Gombarov stood eyeing his work with great satisfaction, untroubled by any of the qualms which assailed John.

For the time being he contented himself by lopping off a few of the smaller branches, to take home with them. But thereafter, he would go out with John once a week, and they would bring back a log with them, sometimes two, which they would drop in the little narrow space between their cottage and the next.

Unluckily for the Gombarovs, the Company one day sent its German carpenter, a Karl Schwartz, to make some long-asked-for repairs, and it was while examining the exterior of the house that he stumbled upon a couple of logs in that narrow alley. When no one was looking he took a measure of them, and with an eye to finding favour with his employers went to the woods to investigate. He beheld the remnant of the fallen tree with hardly less satisfaction than Gombarov some weeks before, if of a different nature. There was something of the stage villain about Schwartz.

Two days later, while at work in the mill, Raya, Dunya and John received notice that their services would no longer be required at the end of the week.

They were frightened and mystified. They did not know why they were being discharged.

But the mystery became clear, when young Fritz Schwartz, a chip of the old block, approached John and berated him for being the son of a tree thief, if not an

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accomplice. Then John understood all at once what had happened.

"Dey vas going at foist to haf your fadder pinched, but dey haf changed deir minds. You're lucky, my poy!" was the further information vouchsafed by Fritz.

John was dumbfounded. So they were going to arrest his stepfather, but changed their minds! He understood the aspersion: they were criminals, but they were also poor. There was nothing to be got out of them. It wasn't worth the trouble to arrest Gombarov.

That evening John and Fritz fought outside the mill, watched by a delighted crowd, and neither the blood flowing from his cut cheek, nor even the blood flowing freely from Fritz's nose, aroused fear or pity in him, so filled was he with weariness of life and reckless despair. But Dunya had somehow got wind of the affair; it was she who cut her way boldly through the hostile crowd, separated the combatants, and led John away home with her, in the face of John's own objections and the hoots of the crowd, robbed of its favourite spectacle.

What sort of evening did the Gombarovs spend, how did they feel, what were their thoughts? Did they have rice soup for supper, or something else? Strangely enough, John Gombarov, in later years, remembered nothing of what happened that evening, nor whether they had rice soup or something else. He had a dim recollection of dead silence . . . .

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CHAPTER XV

THE GOMBAROVS MIGRATE FROM THEIR HOUSE ON A HILL TO A CUL-DE-SAC IN TOWN

A WEEK later, Semyon Gombarov, gathering up his goods and family, moved into town again. Altogether they numbered nine. There were Gombarov and his wife; then there were Raya, Dunya and John by Gombarova's first husband; and Gombarov's own children: Katya and Absalom, and Sonya, and baby Margaret, in the order of their birth.

Friendless and cut off from their own kin, they moved like a small primitive tribe, patriarchal in character; except for their dependence a state in themselves.

The heads of cattle, customary to such migrative narratives, are out of question here. The Gombarovs had none. As for the seventy-five heads of fowl, bred by Gombarov, he sold them, leaving an odd fat one over to make their last dinner in the old house. Their fortune in money, saved for just such an emergency, consisted of fifty dollars, barely enough to give one a chance to look around.

They moved into a poorer section of the town, and began their "new life" in a small two-story house, in a *cul-de-sac.*

Much befell them there, in that *cul-de-sac.*

Many years afterward, sitting in a London café, among friends, John Gombarov bethought himself of

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that little *cul-de-sac* in the City of Brotherly Love. They were discussing *cul-de-sacs*.

"I wouldn't like to live in a *cul-de-sac,*" said Ninette, a sprightly French girl, showing her pretty teeth. "You can't look out of the window and see the world, see people pass by."

"The whole universe is a *cul-de-sac,*" said, in his deep, solemn bass voice, Julius Strogovsky, a Russian who had studied philosophy for many years in a German university.

"And what do you think about it?" asked Gombarov, turning to Douglass.

"A *cul-de-sac* is a blind alley, and that's all there's to it," replied Douglass gruffly, for like level-headed Scotsmen, he had a contempt for German philosophy.

John Gombarov alone refrained from giving his opinion. He lost himself in the thought of the little *cul-de-sac* he knew so well in the City of Brotherly Love. At the same time a vision rose in his mind of a little cove in the north of Devon, where at high tide the oncoming waves beat their arms desperately, retiring at short whiles, only to return in new fierce onslaughts against that wall of rock.

He was thinking: he would like some day to write a large volume about that little *cul-de-sac,* God giving him strength.

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